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Cover picture

Hugh Welch Diamond's photograph of a "Victorian Ophelia". Diamond, physician to the female department of the Surrey Asylum in the mid-nineteenth century, has here imposed on an inmate the conventional Ophelia costume of flower wreath and shawl. The pioneering psychiatric photographer's picture is reproduced from Elaine Showalter's *The Female Malady*, reviewed on page 940.

Paradigm lost

Michael Ignatieff

STANLEY W. JACKSON
Melancholia and Depression: From Hippocratic times to modern times
411pp. Yale University Press. £35.
030037007

JULIA KRISTEVA
Soleil noir: Dépression et mélancolie
265pp. Paris: Gallimard. 82fr.
2 07 217091 9

Of all the painful features of a depression, the worst may be its truth. As long as some portion of our minds believes that our reactions and emotions are exaggerated, we can shield ourselves from the full force of melancholia. But if we convince ourselves that depression lays bare the reality of our existence, we experience our own despair as the scourge of truth, and the scourge of truth always bites deeper than the scourge of error.

Since we are the only animals who observe our own pain and thus aggravate it, we spend much of our time in a depression frantically trying to distinguish the truth and falsehood of our own experience. Sometimes we feel in the grip of false and exaggerated emotions over which we have no control. We feel we have been invaded by a sadness without cause, an unreasoning deaf to reason itself. At other phases of the depressive cycle, however, it is the truth of our emotions which strikes us as unbearable. Our despair seems to cast a sinister light of truth on all our former experience. In this phase, depression appears as the bearer of bad but indisputable tidings.

All the tact required in comforting the depressed turns on a delicate handling of this issue of truth. Nothing is more likely to arouse rage than tiny eudaemonism of the variety "Look on the bright side". "Don't let things get out of proportion". The insult here is an insult to the truth of lived experience. Yet it will not do to compliment them on the veracity of their feelings either. They will hardly appreciate being told life is an absurd charade and that they are worthless and unlovable creatures. A struggling mind wants to know that it is battling with error rather than truth, yet it also wants its errors taken seriously, listened to "as if" they were true.

Given that the truth content of a depression is difficult to distinguish, and when distinguished, difficult to bear, it is scarcely surprising that medical discourse, by and large, has had little to say about depression's truth or falsity. For the most part medicine takes the exaggeration of depressive beliefs for granted. It is the irrationality of depressive symptoms that makes them a medical subject. It is only when "common unhappiness" passes over into "hysterical misery", as Freud put it, that the doctors are called in. As a result medical discourse has always been more concerned with the management of patients and the development of remedies than in the epistemology of depressive perception.

Stanley Jackson's meticulously researched *Melancholia and Depression* catalogues the slow passage of medical opinion from the black bile theory of the ancients through the humoral pathology of the medieval doctors and the mechanical and chemical explanations of the Enlightenment to the modern fields of neurology and neuro-psychiatry. His most interesting conclusion is that there has been little historical relativity in the symptoms or description of depression. It is a malady whose effects seem relatively independent of changes in the language in which they are experienced. The content of depressive delusion may be religious, secular, sexual or pious by turns, and the explanations of depressive behaviour may favour the bile, the humour or the cerebral lesion, but the cluster of symptoms - apathy, listlessness, inattention - show remarkable consistency over time.

But if symptoms may not have changed much the lived experience of depression surely has. The crucial historical variable must be how various epochs have assessed the truth of depressive states. Because Jackson's account isolates medical discourse from its circumambient culture, he has little to say on the matter, but it stands to reason that both patients and doctors will derive their view of the truth-content of depression from the metaphysics of life abroad in the wider culture. If, for example,

they conceive of life as an essentially calculative pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain, they are more likely to regard an episode of depression as a regrettable lapse into madness than they are if they believe that mental suffering is a necessary feature of human experience. A Benthamite will be more likely to discount the truth of depressive experience than a Dostoevskian. The Romantic reaction against the Enlightenment turned, in part, on just this sort of re-evaluation of the worth of exalted or depressed emotional experience. Because Jackson's doctors never give the impression of having read the poets and artists, his history has no place for the impact of such shifts in cultural metaphysics. His is an entirely "internalist" account: medical discourse changes in dialogue with itself and with itself alone.

In his work depression remains cordoned off between the covers of medical treatises: it loses its capacity to lay bare the truth of life as a whole and becomes merely a pitiable disease pinioned by science. When Jackson concludes

of the Western tradition which have insisted on the productive role of depression in the creative process itself and in the search for knowledge about human nature. In French literature, this minority tradition is represented by a heterogeneous line of descent running from Pascal ("la grandeur de l'homme est grande en ce qu'il se connaît misérable") through Rousseau's *Confessions*, through Nerval (of whose "El Desdichado" Kristeva gives a brilliant interpretation) to Céline and Marguerite Duras. It was Céline who wrote in *Voyage au bout de la nuit* "C'est peut-être ça qu'on cherche à travers la vie, rien que cela, le plus grand chagrin possible pour devenir soi-même avant de mourir." But such insistence on melancholia as a state of grace is exceptional in French thought. In the Cartesian gridlock of French culture, "La mélancolie", Kristeva writes, "n'est pas française."

In European thought, Kristeva focuses particularly on melancholia as the voice of metaphysical or religious doubt. She devotes



A melancholic asylum patient - one of the photographs in *The Female Malady: Women, madness and English culture, 1830-1980* by Elaine Showalter, which is reviewed on the following page.

that depression takes us to the "very heart of being human", he means only that a lot of human beings get depressed and that we shouldn't treat them as freaks. He seems oblivious of the more complicated thought that depression is a way of seeing, one which captures an essential aspect of human existence. As such, depression is both a personal catastrophe and a necessary stage in our encounter with life.

It is unsurprising that Julia Kristeva's *Soleil noir* should keep faith with the idea of the truth of depression. As a distinguished French literary critic, she has been formed within two traditions, the Freudian and the linguistic, pre-eminently disposed to treat depression as a discourse to be understood, Freud insisted on the purposiveness of depression as an act of mourning and revenge for a lost love object, and "the talking cure" presumed that there was a meaning in even the most exaggerated and absurd fancies of the depressive imagination. As a critic, Kristeva is drawn to those parts

the Enlightenment were in flight before the essentially tragic character of the human situation. Any pattern of thought, Dostoevsky believed, which maintained that men seek primarily to avoid suffering was simply too shallow to deserve consideration, and any philosophy which ignored the human craving for pardon and forgiveness fatally misunderstood the guilt which bears down on all human beings.

If Dostoevsky was religious, it was because he believed that no purely human system of justice could satisfy this longing for forgiveness, and if he was, in Western terms, a reactionary it was because he believed no scheme of political betterment could hope to cure the sadness at the heart of human existence. Melancholia, therefore, was for Dostoevsky the way-station in which he became convinced of the fatality of Western political and social optimism. Yet few writers have been less indulgent about the delusions to which the depressive is prone. His portrait of Raskolnikov is a study of the ways in which all of the nihilist claptrap of an age could work its way into the mind of a depressed student, and in all his writing Dostoevsky displayed an uncanny appreciation of the split consciousness of depression, that paralysing awareness that one is prey to a delusion yet utterly powerless to drive it from one's mind.

Dostoevsky's only rival as a psychologist of depression is, of course, Freud. As a novelist, Dostoevsky was free of the obligation to theorize and therefore free of the temptation to reduce the disparate discourses of depression to a single cause. He would have seen the sexual and metaphysical sources of depression as distinct, while Freud tended to regard the religious or metaphysical language of despair as the masked discourse of grief and revenge directed towards some lost love-object - usually the mother - of early infancy. Kristeva's discussion of Dostoevsky and Freud, subtle and penetrating as it is, does not address this difference of approaches, and the suspicion remains that Freud never really accorded metaphysical or religious despair any autonomy from the sexual as a predetermining cause of melancholy.

However different their treatment of the metaphysical or religious element in despair, both learned from their own prolonged experience of melancholia to respect the often cracked or fractured truth of depression. In Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia", one of his seminal essays, written during the First World War, the irrational content of depression is seen as lying in the patient's refusal to accept either the necessity of losing the mother or the anger that follows the loss.

Kristeva, however, outlines a distinct depressive syndrome in which what is mourned is not so much the loss of the mother as the loss of the self. In narcissistic depression, she argues, "la tristesse serait le signal d'un moi primitif blessé, incomplet, vide". This type of depression is especially characteristic of women: she devotes the longest section of the book to three case-histories of female depression, and a further section to the fiction of Marguerite Duras, who has made the somnambulist's world of female depression her imaginative terrain *par excellence*. Kristeva points out that one of the symptoms of narcissistic depression is a strange absorption with suffering, as if the depression was itself being embraced as a substitute for the lost self. To call this mood self-indulgent is in fact to miss the irony that depressives actually feel they have no self to indulge, hence their rooted embrace of pain as a substitute for lost identity. In the speechless twilight of their despair, they stare fixedly at a mirror which gives back no reflection.

If one assumes that every little boy or girl naturally develops a sense of self, the depressive's paralysed state will seem irritating, perverse or irrational. If, on the other hand, one appreciates as Freud came to do that identity formation is a perilous, contingent and uncertain process, then the depressive begins to appear as the one among us who sees the terror of the game more clearly than the rest. Understanding the rationale of depression does not of course imply celebrating despair as a form of insight. The tragedy of a depressive's position is that he or she remains frozen in front of the mirror, locked in a hopeless search for a vanished self-image. Selves are made not in self-contemplation but in activity with others.

but the narcissist is unable to join the game. The Narcissus of classical mythology drowned in his own reflection in the water. For a narcissist trapped inside depression, death can appear not only as an escape from pain but also as the promise of a reunion with the vanished self of earliest infancy.

This analysis of depression locates its logic in the adult's refusal to grow up, to accept the necessity of moving beyond the mother's orbit. Recovery would thus require an identification of the lost love-object their unconscious continues to mourn. Yet Kristeva goes on to argue that there are some forms of depression which cannot be cured by finding this lost love-object and bringing it to consciousness. This is because the mourning at the heart of melancholy is not directed at a specific object at all, but at the human subject's alienation from reality itself. In the cludivest, most difficult but also most suggestive section of *Soleil noir*, she develops the distinction, made by Heidegger and amplified by Lacan, between *l'objet* (the specific love object - mother, father, etc) and *la chose*, defined not only as "la réelle rebelle à la signification", reality in its unnamable materiality.

Why do human beings mourn *la chose*? Because we were all once at one with the breast: in adult life that dissolution of self and other reminds the lost paradigm of all our desired relations with the external world. The depressive feels disinherited of "un suprême bien innommable", which no actual object of desire can compensate or replace. Depression, therefore, is rooted in the primal insatiability of all human desiring, in the inability of any actual

objects to satisfy our initial desire to regain a oneness with the world. As Kristeva puts it, a depressive is therefore a mystic. While the rest of us give in, before we know it, to the reality principle, to the strained and adjusted satisfactions of adult life, the melancholic person holds on to a (biological?) memory of primal satisfaction and refuses the dubious consolation of life's substitute pleasures. The central truth which the depressive knows and which the shallowly happy person forgets is that human beings are both insatiable and unconsolable.

It is difficult to assess the idea that all human desire pursues unattainable pleasure; that all human beings retain the trace of their primal identification with their mothers; and that this identification haunts and often impedes the formation of their adult identities. Kristeva's account raises a host of questions. Does consciousness of *la chose* function as a sort of genetic or biological memory? Or is it a sense of lack discovered in adulthood through the use of language? In describing the ordinary depressed person as a mystic, Kristeva wants to bring out the similarities between the experience of melancholia and religious visions of paradise. Given the omnipresence of mortality, need and lack in human experience, it is remarkable that all human cultures seem capable of generating a vision of paradise, of a world beyond death, hunger and shortage. In the same way, Kristeva seems to imply, normal human consciousness can develop a vision of personal plenitude which mocks the limited pleasures of adult life and thus haunts and diminishes those pleasures. Depression is thus

a tortured meditation on paradise, a mystic's refusal to be reconciled to death and alienation.

Language obviously plays a central part in this theory of depression. Being speechless is both a symptom and a cause of depression, and finding words for suffering the first step in overcoming it. Kristeva's idea that there is some reality forever refractory to language, implies that there must be some sadness that can never even be put into words. Yet she also implies that language is a Sisyphean struggle against this essential element of incommunicability in the inner and outer world, and depression the recognition of it. Why this should be so, why the act of naming or uttering the pain should help it to go away is the mystery at the heart of the talking cure. What mattered about talking, Freud said, was not only what the patient says, but who he or she says it to. The therapeutic effect of talk consisted not only in naming the repressed, but in setting up a transference relationship with the analyst in which the patient could act out the hurt and forgotten child in its relation to the lost mother or hated father.

Kristeva's contribution is to emphasize the relation between therapy and aesthetics, to tease out some of the reasons why beauty has the capacity to comfort. She is particularly concerned to understand why representations of depression or depressing subjects nevertheless retain their capacity to reassure and revive those who perceive them. Holbein's coldly realist painting stripped away the transfigurational aura conventionally used to convey hope in the resurrection of Christ, and yet the

painting manages to embody a calm and profound formal beauty. It is as if Holbein were telling us that it is painting alone, the human representation of beauty, which offers mankind the possibility of immortality. Kristeva wishes us in turn to understand art as a human attempt to create the serene completeness which we carry with us from childhood and which haunts us in depression.

Art and melancholia are thus *frères ennemis*. In melancholia we are dragged beneath the flat surface of our contentment to encounter the harsher truth of life which our illusions conceal from us. As such melancholia is a key medium of artistic insight. At the same time, in its acutest form it is speechlessness, the paralyzed incapacity to represent anything. For every great artist, propelled into speech by depression, there must be countless others whom it forever reduces to silence. Even the beauty which some manage to wrest from it may only deepen the depression of others. For everyone inspired by beauty, there are others consumed by envy or hatred of its perfection. Kristeva seems to ignore the depressive effects of such envy, yet her emphasis on the relation between therapy and aesthetics is suggestive. Although she does not develop the thought, it could be argued that much of the struggle of an analysis consists in the effort to create an aesthetically rounded and complete narrative of one's own life. When one does finally manage to write that story, with a beginning, a middle and an end, the healing properties of the story-telling would seem to lie not only in what the story names but also in the aesthetic roundness, the beauty of it.

In praise of ancient virtues

Albert Hourani

WILFRED THESIGER
The Life of My Choice
499pp. Collins. £15.
000216194 X

Wilfred Thesiger's name has been familiar for many years as that of an intrepid traveller and explorer and as a soldier who played an important part in liberating Abyssinia from Italian rule. He has already given us a record of some of his journeys in Arabia and his long residence in the marshes of southern Iraq, in works which have become classics and are likely always to find readers: *Arabian Sands*, *The Marsh Arabs* and *Desert, Marsh and Mountain*. Now, in this autobiography, he looks back over a life of more than seventy years. There is little in it about the Arabian journeys, much about his early life: childhood in Addis Ababa, where his father was British minister from 1909 to 1919; education in England; early travels in the Danakil country in Abyssinia and in the west and south of the Sudan; and then an adventurous war in Abyssinia with the forces of national resistance, in Syria with the Druze Legion recruited by the British, and in the Western Desert with the Special Air Service. After descriptions of later journeys in Abyssinia, the book closes with an account of the revolution which brought the rule of the Emperor to an end, significantly called "Last Days of a Civilization".

The main focus is on Abyssinia and the Sudan, and on the surface it may appear that Thesiger is filling in the gaps left by what he has already recorded, and showing us the way in which he prepared himself for his travels in Arabia. It would be a mistake, however, to see the book in this light only. It is a work of a different kind from his earlier writings. In them, the main attention was given to the peoples, sights and sounds which the author encountered. The beduin with whom he travelled and the marsh-dwellers among whom he lived are in the foreground; the author himself is not absent, but his is a somewhat mysterious presence, that of a traveller whose motives and aims are as puzzling to the reader as they may have been to those among whom he moved. In this book, the light falls differently: sights, sounds and smells, people met and observed, are depicted with the same clarity as that which marked the earlier books, but now the author himself emerges, seen in the same way, lucidly, honestly, and with a kind of innocence.

The book can be read, and its author seen, in several different ways. There is something in it which is reminiscent of those scenes from imperial life which used to fill books of memoirs and volumes of *Blackwood's Magazine*. The traveller moves in a world of privilege. On his first journey among the Danakil, Thesiger travelled with some twenty followers (cooks, personal servants, gunbearers, grooms and camelmen), with ponies, riding-mules, pack-mules and eighteen camels, and with an escort of soldiers provided by the Emperor. In the Sudan his company was smaller, but he had the protection of the Sudan Political Service, to which he belonged and which treated him, as he fully acknowledges, with great forbearance and sensitivity. At the end of the journey there was a welcoming home, with warm baths and good food, among his own people, in Addis Ababa, Khartoum, Mukalla, Dubai or Basra. There are descriptions of strange peoples and places, and a vivid sense of the natural world: mountains, precipices and rivers, trees and flowers, animals and birds observed the more precisely because they are the objects of his skillful shooting. He tells us that he shot seventy lions in the Sudan, some forty in Darfur and the rest in the Nuer district in the south, and he describes quite a number of these encounters. He only shot four elephants, because he was licensed to kill two a year. Later, in the Iraqi marshes, he shot innumerable wild boar.

In spite of soldiers and companions, the journeys were really dangerous: earlier travellers among the Danakil had been killed; empty quarters in Arabia. The descriptions of what it is like to stand up to a charging lion are of absorbing interest; even to someone who has never shot a lion or wished to shoot one.

Thesiger conveys a sense of the skill needed, the danger incurred, and the excitement of "the sound of the bullet striking home". In his later years he has become an honorary game warden in Kenya, but in the 1930s, he tells us, lions were regarded as "vermin" in the Sudan, and a danger to villagers and nomads; to shoot them, as later to shoot wild boar in the marshes, was to do a service, and open a door to regard and acceptance similar to that opened by the medicine-chest which he carried with him. Birds and smaller mammals were welcome additions to a diet on long journeys which was always monotonous and often inadequate.

At another level, the book is an evocation of a world once known and loved, now vanished, by which the author's imagination is still possessed. When his father first arrived in Abyssinia, the governor of Harar sent an escort to meet him. He described it in a letter to his mother: the chiefs and notables gorgeous in mantles of silver, with capes of lion or leopard-skin about their shoulders, jewelled coronets fringed with lions' manes, shields embossed with gold or silver, and curved swords with richly decorated scabbards. This was his first sight of the "barbaric splendour" of the Abyssinian Empire, and his son was to see it a few years later. At the age of six Thesiger watched the army of Ras Tafari, who was later to become the Emperor Haile Selassie, going forth to war, and, a few days later, coming back to Addis Ababa in triumph, with minstrels singing war-songs, slaves on mules beating battle drums, chiefs, banners, the icons of churches which had sent their Arks to be present at the battle, and the defeated chieftains led in chains. "Even now, nearly seventy years later, I can recall almost every detail. . . . In boyish fancy, I watched the likes of Achilles, Ajax and Ulysses pass in triumph with aged Priam, proud even in defeat."

His memories of the Addis Ababa of his childhood are of barbarism as well as splendour:

The clothes, the buildings, the pitch and intonation of voices speaking Amharic; the smell of rancid butter, of red peppers and burning dung that permeated the town; the packs of savage dogs that roamed the streets and whose howling rose and fell through the night; an occasional corpse hanging on the gallows-tree; beggars who had lost a hand or foot for theft; debtors and creditors wandering round chained together; strings of donkeys bringing in firewood; caravans of mules; the crowded market where men and women squatted on the ground, selling earthen pots, lengths of cloth, skins, cartridges, bars of salt, silver ornaments, heaps of grain, vegetables, beer - all this combined to create a scene and an atmosphere unlike any other in the world.

His first sight of the outside world did nothing to dispel the image of "barbaric splendour". In 1919 the family went to stay with his uncle, who was Viceroy of India. The Vice-Regal Lodge, the tiger hunt, the palace at Jaipur where wild animals fought in an amphitheatre for the entertainment of the guests: these reinforced a certain idea of what life should be. Then came England: first of all a preparatory school at Rottingdean, where the headmaster was a sadist, and where the other boys did not believe his stories. Eton was better, for there he found "long-established custom and ritual"; he was taught in a classroom which had been in use since 1443. Oxford seems to have meant less to him. He responded to its beauty and the kindness shown by some of the dons, but the history he was supposed to be studying did not appeal to him. His was a "romantic view of history". He was enthralled by the movements of peoples which had shaped the history of the world. His improbable heroes were the great conquerors, Attila, Genghis Khan and Timur Leng. (A photograph on the back of the jacket shows a face of extraordinary, almost frightening strength, with eyes fixed steadily on some remote place.) His studies, and the works of Rudyard Kipling, John Buchan and Joseph Conrad, strengthened the memories of childhood and a longing for the distant places of Asia and Africa: "The cities I had seen in England and France left me unmoved." What moved him were the call of the muezzin in the stillness of dawn, the cry of the hyena, evoking the African night, and "that authentic Eastern world of which Conrad wrote . . . remote, beautiful, untamed."

"You are Old Stone Age", his Kenyan friend and adopted son once said to him. If not from the Stone Age, Thesiger certainly seems to come from an age almost as remote, that of Kipling and Buchan; his "romantic view of history" is that which is implicit in their novels, and is derived from some of the seminal ideas of the nineteenth century. There are pure races which, unless "mongrelized" by the imposition or acceptance of foreign ideas, can create and preserve their own civilizations, freely expressing their beliefs and values. Such, he believes, was the Abyssinia of his childhood and youth; such too was the England he knew as he was growing up, the England of Eton, Magdalen and country life. He is not a primitivist, however. Although claiming to be at home among nomads more than settled people, he responds to the great artefacts of ancient civilizations: the Islamic cities - Fez, Damascus, Jerusalem, and above all Cairo - and the rock-churches of Abyssinia.

These civilizations have expressed themselves in ceremonies and rituals. He describes the coronation of Haile Selassie in 1930, the Easter ceremonies in the rock-church at Lalibela, and the tribal gatherings in Darfur. He records too, not without appreciation, the ritual of being birched for idleness by the Lower Master at Eton: the junior praepceptor bowing and handing the birch to the senior praepceptor, who handed it with a bow to the Lower Master. "The whole procedure was reminiscent of a beheading on Tower Hill." (In the glossary, the Etonian word "praepceptor" comes between the Amharic for "Emperor" and the Arabic for "judge".) He does not pretend to enjoy it all, however. After describing a dance among the Danakil, he says it "went on for hours and was extraordinarily dull to watch".

Formal manners and dress are important to Thesiger. He praises the hospitality of Druze villagers, and the almost crazy generosity of the beduin with whom he travelled, and who would starve in order to feast a stranger met by

chance in the desert. He dislikes appearing in unsuitable clothes, and his least charitable portrait is of Evelyn Waugh, whom he met at the Emperor's coronation, with his "grey suede shoes, floppy bow-tie and the excessive width of his trousers. . . . I disliked him on sight."

"I have always", he says, "resented the imposition of an alien culture." His early sympathies went to Abd al-Karim fighting the Spaniards and the French in Morocco, to the Druzes in Syria, the Arabs in Palestine, and above all the Abyssinians resisting the Italian invaders. In the Sudan he sided instinctively with the Derivishes, and it may therefore seem inconsistent that he should have spent some years as an official of the Anglo-Egyptian condominium, which was created on the ruins of the Mahdi's empire. He served only in remote places, however, where the task of British officials was to preserve order and administer some kind of justice, and there was as yet no demand for modern education. Much of his life in Darfur was spent on camel-back, and that among the Nuer on the paddle-steamer which served as the local government office, moving from one landing-stage to another, going ashore to trek, and caring little for official correspondence: "we looked through it, and threw most of it overboard. We maintained a couple of files for our own convenience, but circulars from Khartoum . . . bore no relevance to our existence here."

Thesiger is too intelligent, and too fully aware of the real world, to believe that this mode of existence could have endured for ever. The intrusion of the drab, uniform modern world could not be prevented, but it could be deferred for as long as possible. Haile Selassie, the hero of the book, if it has a hero, was aware of this; he was anxious to change Abyssinia, but to do so from within, and at the right pace. He faced two dangers, from those who did not want change, and those who wanted it to go further and faster. The final chapter shows him at the end of his reign, increasingly isolated, oblivious to the demand for participa-

In the mirror of madness

Marina Warner

ELAINE SHOWALTER

The Female Malady: Women, madness and English culture, 1830-1980
308pp. Virago. Paperback, £6.95.
085068690 0

In the opening sequence of Robert Wiene and Carl Mayer's 1920s film drama, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, a young woman appears, somnambulist, beautiful, with huge mysterious eyes. She is called Jane ("Crazy Jane") and dressed in white raiment down to the ground, like other stock figures of madness, Wilkie Collins's *Woman in White*, Miss Havisham. Her condition - moonstruck, lunatic - is familiar, even inevitable; she is suffering from the "female malady", the derangement of the senses to which women are specially prone. Indeed since the Greeks diagnosed hysteria as rising in the wandering womb, women and madness have been seen to bear a natural affinity; it seems easily accepted that madness lay inside women, waiting to be let out. In general, the Victorians feared this ascribed susceptibility; the Surrealists, coming after, and longing for *le dérelement de tous les sens*, admitted it; both expectations had the effect of helping to drive women mad.

In this judicious book, which ranges lucidly and sunily over many bitter matters, Elaine Showalter describes the approaches of official medicine towards the problems of female madness. It is a most illuminating and readable narrative. Like other feminist literary critics Showalter in her earlier work took up the question of the woman's body in the fictional text and showed just how closely metaphor and actuality are intertwined. In this new book, she works with the body of patients in history, and discovers in their ordeals a new set of diagnostic images for female difference.

Still maintaining a reasonable, level tone, she describes the harrowing cures, which proceeded by sympathetic magic, like "shamant" exorcisms. Women crazed by lives of enforced idleness were confined for six weeks of stuffing food and bed-rest; young girls with sexual fantasies and anxieties had leeches applied to their genitals, or had their vulvae packed with ice. Control of the mad screens the wider issue of social subordination itself, and the study of its history provides a two-way mirror through which we can observe the psychiatrist and his idea of normality with as much clinical exper-

tise and power as he showed when he applied his own assumptions of insanity. This mirror is of course angled for infinite recession: we are as bound by our own ideas about madness and female nature as Showalter's subjects.

Of all the Dr Caligaris whom she analyses, John Conolly, the presiding genius of the phase she names "psychiatric Victorianism" (1820-70), emerges as the most benign and likeable. Conolly became the apostle of "moral management" of the insane, discarding the impedimenta of the past, the gags and leg-irons and other restraints formerly used on lunatics. He advocated routine, quiet, privacy and gentleness; the asylums which opened during his period of influence, like the huge Colney Hatch (surviving as Friern Barnet) for over a thousand patients, were exemplary Victorian institutions, showcases of benevolent paternalism, humanistic reforms and belief in human perfectibility. Dances were held, and spectators attended, not to gawp at the frenzy of the inmates, as at Bedlam in the past, but to observe the seaminess. Dickens wrote of the Christmas Ball at St Luke's Hospital in 1851:

There was the brisk, pipkin-faced little old lady, in a fantastic cap - proud of her foot and ankle; there was the old young woman, with the dishevelled long light hair, spare figure, and weird gait; there was the vacantly laughing girl, requiring now and then a warning finger to admonish her. . . .

This was surely an improvement on the horrors of past brutalization? Yet, Showalter argues, the decorum of the mould into which the female subject was poured - that "weird gentility" - was in effect a Victorian counterpart of the scold's bridle. She reproduces some of the photographs Hugh Diamond took of Conolly's charges - so many "Ophelias" and "Crazy Janes", posed and mute. Their words were not recorded; and their healers left no legacy of story about them.

In the same way as country midwives were ousted by male professionals, the matrons and other unqualified staff - often wives of the doctors - who had been so important to the mad were, with the growing respectability of public asylums, gradually forbidden to help. It wasn't until 1927 that the London County Council approved women doctors in asylums. The domination of the male doctor, as confessor, wizard, medicine-man, shaped the attitudes of Showalter's second generation, "psychiatric Darwinists". The leading exponent, Charles Maudsley, was Conolly's son-in-law. He could not, however, conceal his contempt for his tender-hearted predecessor. Even in his obituary, he reproved Conolly for

his "feminine" type of mind, which "might even express itself in tears", and opined, "a character most graceful and beautiful in a woman is no gift of fortune to a man having to meet the adverse circumstances . . . of a tumultuous life".

Maudsley was dismissive, angry and Hobbesian in temper, seeing a hereditary taint in madness; he hoped to find a physical cause, like syphilis, for all derangement, and maintained that women's reproductive cycle and organs inclined them to lunacy. He also noted however that the weary, stale, flat and unprofitable lives so many were required to lead contributed to the neurasthenia from which they began to suffer in increasing numbers among the middle classes. He did not, however, advocate any remedy, believing rather that education damaged girls' minds. The profession concurred; the American neurologist George Miller Beard blamed periodicals, steam-power, the telegraph, the sciences and "especially the increased mental activity of women" for the "sapping of American nervous strength". Even a pioneer doctor, Margaret Cleaves, would acquiesce that at times work gave her a "sprained brain".

Showalter necessarily extends her focus on English practice to include Breuer and Freud, and their discovery, in the case of Anna O (the remarkable and gifted Bertha Pappenheim), that a woman could be made better by talking. For the first time the "alienists" were listening to the patient, and the woman's own experience of the female malady was breaking the surface of their consciousness. Showalter offers the fascinating perception that the *globus hystericus*, the choking sensation most hysterics experienced, actually reproduced physically the gag society placed upon their inner desires and thoughts. And in defiance of feminist critiques of Freud, she pays generous tribute to him for loosening it.

But she does also hint at the vexing insight that the female patient collaborates in her psychoanalysis with the desires of her doctor, that even a brilliant and articulate subject like Anna O finds herself cast on the temple of his expectations and wishes. For this reason, perhaps, so many women analysts past and present do not challenge the Freudian theory of women's inherent sense of deficiency, and the totemic and immovable place of the symbolic phallus. Showalter points to grips with the problem of collusion between patient and doctor, and their united reinforcement of the pre-arranged symbolic order in her fascinating pages about Siegfried Sassoon's therapy with

W. H. R. Rivers in Scotland. Rivers restored to Sassoon belief in the war and in soldiering, to combat on the front line, as befitted an officer and a gentleman. But while Sassoon fortified himself against the unmanliness of his flight from the war and his homosexuality, Rivers began to doubt the ethic he was inculcating. In this drama between men, Showalter counts the cost of sexual typecasting with implications beyond the madhouse. Shell-shocked soldiers were not permitted to break down. As Ford Madox Ford's character put it in *Parade's End*, "Why isn't one a beastly girl and privileged to shriek?"

Showalter does not perhaps look closely enough at the strategic opportunities madness could present to women, especially young women. Being privileged to shriek may have had its moments. The relation between inspiration, religious experience and madness, between expressions of faith, female artistry and early feminism - the milieu of *Adam Bede*, *The Bostonians* and *Jude the Obscure* - might have been worth more attention. The inspired, the vatic and the spiritual provided one outlet; could there be a sense in which women could rise "armed with madness"? Under the sign of Folly, as at carnival time, there reigned a form of liberty: the drag queen in France, *la folle*, breaks the rules - and gets away with it.

Showalter's third phase, 1920-80, "psychiatric modernism", concentrates on the personality of R. D. Laing. Her writing communicates the excitement she felt at his analysis of the oppression within the family and the damaging effects on daughters, but she has to indict him finally for his own deafness to the sexual conflicts in the doctor-madwoman relation. In this, Laing was, in his own words, "a symptom of the Sixties".

The Female Malady perforce depends on the testimony of literate and creative women of genius - like Florence Nightingale and Sylvia Plath and Janet Frame. Can they really speak for the thousands of chronic patients who were never heard and still cannot make themselves heard? There is here an enormous emptiness. More information about background: incomes, work, age, could have been given (if available); and more awareness of unpleasant factors like cost-efficiency (ECT being rather cheaper than psychoanalysis; lobotomy being *final*, as it were). But these are cavils. Elaine Showalter has found that the asylum not the attic is the madwoman's place, and she has walked the long stone corridors to hear her, with unparaphrasing but never sentimental

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tion by those classes which he had called into existence, until his deposition and the humiliations of his last days.

At its deepest level, Thesiger's book is an exploration of his own mind and temperament. "We realized when we selected you that you were rather odd", the Civil Secretary in the Sudan once said to him. He records this without comment or dissent, and in a sense his book is an attempt to explain what makes him "odd". He has the gifts needed for this. The wild adventurousness of his life should not make us forget that he is a sensitive and reflective man, who has observed human nature keenly and can depict it in language of exemplary clarity and precision.

His descriptions of those he has known convey a sense of the standards by which he judges himself and others. Evelyn Waugh comes out badly, and not only because he was incorrectly dressed: "impercipient of the last manifestation of Abyssinia's traditional pagantry... he ridiculed the ceremonies in impeccable prose, and disparaged the British Minister and his family, who had not invited him to lunch". Orde Wingate, with whom Thesiger served in Abyssinia, is judged almost as harshly: arrogant, resentful of authority, savage, bad-mannered and dirty, but almost redeeming himself by the originality of his thought and the boldness of his imagination. On the other hand, David Stirling, the creator of the Special Air Service, "dressed and behaved in a civilized manner". At the top of the scale comes the Emperor, to whom the book is dedicated: dignified, patient, merciful, courageous, devoted to his country, with a deep religious faith.

Such sketches of character provide by implication a picture of what Thesiger himself would wish to be. He belongs to that line of English travellers who, by living in a strange world, hoped not only to see themselves as they really were but to become truly themselves. His spiritual forebears are C. M. Doughty and T. E. Lawrence; he took their books with him to the Sudan and he is conscious of an affinity. There is a difference, however. Although Doughty has captured the world of central Arabia with perfect precision, his own personality remains obscure to the reader; in Lawrence's work, a tormented self-consciousness casts its distorting shadow across the pictures of the Arabs as well as himself; but by the end of this book the reader may feel that he knows Thesiger's character and motives as well as one person can know another.

His first recorded words, he tells us, were "Go away". This can have two meanings, both of them relevant: a refusal to allow others to direct his life, and a wish to travel to far places. One of his motives has been the simple wish to explore, "the lure of the unknown", "the compulsion to go where others had not been", the longing to catch the ancient world before it vanished for ever, and to recapture "that silence that we have now driven from the world".

Such travels called out and reinforced certain traits of personality: physical toughness (he was only once ill during all his journeys), iron determination and a genuine austerity:

Looking back on my attitude to the commonly accepted pleasures of life, I can say that I have never set much store by them. I hardly care what I eat, provided it suffices, and I care not at all for wine or spirits. When I was fourteen someone gave me a glass of beer, and I thought it so unpleasant I have never touched beer again. As for cigarettes, I dislike even being in a room where people are smoking. Sex has been of no great consequence to me, and the celibacy of desert life left me untroubled. Marriage would certainly have been a crippling handicap. I have therefore been able to lead the life of my choice with no sense of deprivation. Existence in the desert had a simplicity that I found wholly satisfying; there, everything not a necessity was an encumbrance. It was those three months in the Sahara in 1938 that taught me to appreciate things that most Europeans are able to take for granted: clean water to drink; meat to eat; a warm fire on a cold night; shelter from rain; above all, tired surrender to sleep.

Underlying such a statement is the belief that it is only when a man reaches the limit of endurance that he becomes fully aware of himself and of what is important in his life. The values which Thesiger has found and tested are not those by which most men live nowadays, and certainly not those of a religious faith. At Eton he had refused to say the Creed, "being unable to affirm something which I was unable

to believe. . . . Since then, under the stars in the desert, I had found it impossible to reconcile belief in a personal God . . . with whatever abstract force governed the universe and regulated all things." When therefore the Assistant Bishop in the Sudan came aboard his paddle-steamer and offered him communion, he was embarrassed, but "accepted the Bishop's offer rather than disappoint this devout and well-meaning man". The Bishop gave him communion in an abandoned Nuer hut: "He then went on to Juha, and I hunted, and shot a lion."

Although willing to fast with his companions on a journey during Ramadan, he could never, he says, have become a Muslim: "not religious conviction but pride in my family background would have forbidden it". The phrase is significant. The values by which he has lived are those which a colleague in the Sudan to whom he was particularly attached, Douglas Newbold, called "an excess of certain ancient virtues", and what he himself calls "responsibility, the decencies of life, and standards of civilized behaviour", which he learnt at Eton.

Life for him is an expression of loyalties, whether inherited or chosen. He writes with pride of his family, with deep affection of the father who died when he was ten. A description of his father taken from an old newspaper cutting does, it must be admitted, call up the image of a figure from an old-fashioned novel of adventure: "many a regicide glanced wrathfully at the nonchalant figure of the tall Englishman strolling unconcernedly in the highways and byways of Belgrade." He seems, however, to have been a man of many gifts, courageous, resourceful, fond of hunting and shooting, but also of poetry and music: the thought of him calls back to mind "the faint sound of his cello, as I lay tucked up in bed". Thesiger's mother, who obviously played a central part in his life, does not come out quite so clearly.

He is not in any sense estranged from his own country, or that part of it which he knows: his flat in Chelsea, his club, Eton, Magdalen College (of which he is an honorary fellow), friends made in youth. His loyalty to Abyssinia is no less strong. He had a "bitter personal hatred" of the Italian invaders and wished to abandon everything in order to fight them: a hatred only assuaged when the entry of Italy into the Second World War allowed him to play a distinctive part in freeing the country from foreign rule and restoring the Emperor. His liking for Abyssinians sometimes goes to surprising lengths. The Danakil were much given to killing and castrating one another, not out of enmity but to prove their manhood, but Thesiger found them attractive and friendly: "murderously inclined, but no-one could call them inhospitable". A young chieftain "struck me as the Danakil equivalent of a nice, rather self-conscious Etonian who had just won his school-colours for cricket".

One of the central themes of the book is the search for a certain kind of friendship, forged by common risks and endeavours, and breaking down the barriers of race and religion. Thesiger is critical of some British and French colonial officials who were not willing to eat with those they ruled. He praises Newbold, Civil Secretary in the Sudan, who had no sense of racial difference, and loved the Sudanese with whom he worked as friends and equals. He writes of Newbold's "kindly, wise and humorous presence", and his gift of friendship; those who remember him, forty years or more after his death, know that this is true.

"All my life", the author tells us, "I have felt the need of human company. . . . I have been most content when I have established a close friendship with individuals. He was never able to cross the barrier with those with whom he travelled in the Danakil country; they were reliable and loyal, but there was no 'authentic friendship'. The Nuer too remained alien, but among the nomads of Darfur and southern Arabia, the *ghazal*-Arabs, and the Abyssinian guerrillas there were individuals of whom he writes with affection. The line ends with a young Kenyan with whose family he lives for most of the year: "he is as dear to me as a son". Such deep feelings are difficult to understand for those who do not share them; it is because of the simple, unforced expression of them that this book — enthralling, at times funny, and "rather odd" — is also rather moving.

Cruel days

Martin Meredith

JAMES McCANN
From Poverty to Famine in Northeast Ethiopia: A Rural History 1900-1935
227pp. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. \$29.95.
0 8122 8038 5

In the words of the nineteenth-century traveller Johan Krapf, the terrain of Wallo province in north-east Ethiopia resembled "a raging and stormy sea, presenting numerous hills of waves with a large space between each wave". A later generation of foreign travellers was drawn there to look at the rock-churches of Lalibela in the Lasta district, dating from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In the early 1960s, the Ethiopian government, endeavouring to promote international tourism, built an airstrip and a hotel at Lalibela. The eight-mile road from the airstrip to the town was the only road in all of Lasta. Then in 1973 Wallo province became famous as the centre of a catastrophic famine which contributed eventually to the downfall of Emperor Haile Selassie. On a journey to Wallo in that fateful year, I came across a lone British army officer climbing over the hills, searching for routes along which relief supplies could be sent to the starving population, dwarfed not only by the magnitude of the crisis but by the sheer might of the landscape.

In this century alone, Ethiopia has suffered eight major famines. Only the last two — in 1972-4 and from 1983-4 — caught international attention, mainly as a result of the work of the television reporters Jonathan Dimbleby and Michael Buerk. In modern times, the yardstick for the severity of such calamities has been the 1889-92 famine, known in most of northern Ethiopia as the "cruel days". It began with a rinderpest epizootic, followed by high temperatures, the failure of the rains, invasions of locusts and army worms, and finally cholera. The famines of the 1970s and 80s were the worst this century, comparable to the 1889-92 crisis.

Oman's land

Peregrine Hodson

PHILIP WARD
Travels in Oman: on the track of the early explorers
557pp. Oleaner Press. £27.50.
0906672511

Philip Ward does not tell us why he decided to travel through Oman, although at the end of his acknowledgements he states the purpose of his book: "If *Travels in Oman* helps to stir the blood — to excite wanderlust — then it will have achieved its objective." Writing about a country such as Oman where the way of life has continued more or less the same for a thousand years, but which has had to adjust rapidly to late twentieth-century realities, is not an easy task. Of his 557 pages, over 350 are reproduced from pamphlets and reports by other, mainly nineteenth-century travellers. A further sixty pages are taken up by photographs of modern-day Oman, so that the original work by Ward amounts to a mere 140 in total. Finding four pages reproduced from the meteorological register for the month of June on the North Eastern Coast of Arabia, 1861, and one page of temperatures for the full twelve months of 1984, the reader may ask whether Ward has achieved a satisfactory order of priorities.

The problem is one of selection. Although many of the nineteenth-century accounts of Oman contained in this book have never been reprinted from the learned journals in which they originally appeared, there is good reason: some are of limited, mainly scholarly interest, and are often written in the densely informative style favoured by Victorian political agents. But descriptions of exotic places are not necessarily entertaining because of their subject matter: the observations of a nineteenth-century bore do not become enthralling merely because they are antique. To his credit, however, Ward is not a myopic sentimentalist: he does not dwell on the

James McCann's reconstruction of the history of the northern Wallo region in the period between 1900 and 1935 provides a remarkable insight into the way in which an impoverished rural population contended not only with natural disasters like famine but with the rival attentions of local warlords. Northern Wallo, notes McCann, never emerged as a strong regional entity and was "often dismembered in the struggle for personal power among Ethiopia's oligarchs". Its final destiny was to be incorporated into Haile Selassie's modern imperial nation, after which it was largely ignored.

This process did not occur without attempts at resistance, inspired as much by local hardship as by resentment against new imperial masters. In 1928, after drought and locusts put paid to hopes of a good harvest, raiding parties from Wallo began to plunder adjacent areas. The interruption this caused to trade prompted Haile Selassie, newly crowned as *negus*, to dispatch a series of expeditionary forces to north-east Ethiopia until all resistance was crushed.

McCann describes in rich detail the impact of such events on life in Wallo, showing how local institutions such as marriage, property and inheritance changed with the region's fluctuating fortunes. His account is all the more impressive because of the dearth of material on northern Wallo. Neither church records nor imperial chronicles proved to be of much use. McCann found, however, a treasure store in Italian consular records. A commercial treaty signed in 1906 between the Italian government and Emperor Menelik gave Italy the right to place "commercial" agents at economically strategic locations in northern Ethiopia to supervise Italian trade interests. "In effect", writes McCann, "the succession of political agents, doctors, telegraphers, and trade specialists constituted a comprehensive and well-informed espionage network that reported to officials of the Ministero delle Colonie on a regular, sometimes daily, basis between 1906 and 1935." All very useful, of course, for planning an invasion. But of equal value to historians trying to reconstruct the region's past.

civil engineering projects with approval, but he gives very little insight into how the life and traditions of Oman have been affected by such developments. The people he meets seem to have very few opinions; as a result, the author's encounters with them seem flat and inconclusive. Nevertheless there are many pleasing discoveries among the pages of this book and we must be grateful to Ward for making them more generally available: the dry, laconic humour of Sir Percy Cox and the robust pluckiness of men such as Lieut-Colonel S. B. Miles and James Theodore Bent, or characters such as Lees, "a tall, doubtless terrifying figure in his battered panama . . . brandishing his geological hammer".

Travels in Oman contains no bibliography and no index of maps (the two most recent representations of Oman entire are Wellstead's of 1834-5 and Miles's of 1885). The quality of reproduction is so poor that in parts the text is almost illegible and some of the photographs look like rectangles of blurred ectoplasm. The pictures taken more recently, presumably by Ward, are somewhat clearer, but oddly captioned: "Scrub on the Dhufar plain near Mirbat, with Ali Ahmad against the Qarah Mountains".

Having accompanied us from Muscat, and thence to Sharqiyah, Jabal Akhdhar and Dhufar, Batina, Musandam and Dhufar, Ward bids us farewell in Ain Humran, seven kilometres off the main road to Tagah. His final words are: "Unobtrusive parking places are hidden so that nature below Jabal Qarah blossoms and burgeons without unsightly interference from machines. Attractive hedges have been cut by a topiarist to form sloped-roofed green 'cabins' linking at the eaves."

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Cry, the divided country

Malcolm Yapp

ROGER SCRUTON
A Land Held Hostage: Lebanon and the West
112pp. Claridge Press, 8 Victoria Square, London SW1. £6.95 (paperback, £4.95).
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\$25 (paperback, \$10.95).
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SAMIR KHALAF
Lebanon's Predicament
328pp. Guildford: Columbia University Press.
\$30.
0 231 06378 4

In the past Lebanon was variously presented to the world as a beacon of freedom in the Middle East, a unique example in the region of the success of a liberal economic system, a refuge for minorities, an outpost of Christianity, a haven of civilization and an integral part of the Mediterranean world. Most of these roles figure in Roger Scruton's lament for a land of lost content. The ills of Lebanon, he suggests, have been the consequences of outside intervention. In the nineteenth century it was the Ottomans who first fostered sectarian conflict there, and since 1975 Syria has been behind the disasters which have overtaken its small neighbour. On the other hand, Scruton bemoans the failure of the West to intervene to support the deserving Christians who made Lebanon such a successful country and for that failure he blames Western newspaper correspondents (and in particular the arch-villain Robert Fisk of *The Times*) for misrepresenting the situation and persistently displaying the Christians in an unfavourable light. He calls on the West to wake up to the true state of affairs and to intervene to remake a free Lebanon, even if its boundaries would necessarily be narrower than those of the present State. Such, he declares, are the hope and duty of Christendom.

One difficulty with Professor Scruton's account arises from the circumstance that the boundaries of Lebanon have fluctuated over time. There is the area which fell under the authority of Fakhr al Din II in the seventeenth century, the Ottoman Mutasarrifate of 1861-1918, and the present state which was created in 1920 and which may be described as the product of Maronite greed and French indulgence. In an intriguing passage Scruton suggests that in advancing their claims the Maronites had in mind the creation of a haven for minorities, but the record shows that they were mainly concerned to create a political unit large enough to be viable as an independent State. Indeed, if a haven for minorities were required, a smaller area would have been appropriate, as some Frenchmen and some Maronites argued at the time. A Christian refuge would have consisted of the northern part of Mount Lebanon, and a haven for minorities of the whole of the Mountain as far south as the Jabal Amil. But such units could have aspired to no more than autonomy within a larger unit on the model of the Mutasarrifate. Economic opportunity required the inclusion of Beirut, if not of Tripoli and Sidon. And it was Beirut also which was the source of the liberal political culture that Scruton admires, not the Maronite rural heartland on the Mountain. In a sentence neatly constructed so as to enable him to have his cake and eat it, Scruton writes, "if there is a modern Arabic culture it is thanks almost entirely to what has been achieved over the last century and a half in Lebanon". That claim can only refer to the achievement of Christian Lebanese writers who learned their craft in Beirut, often at the American University, which Scruton holds responsible for some of Lebanon's troubles. In fact, the attributes claimed for Lebanon apply to different Lebanese, and this truth is constantly obscured in *A Land Held Hostage*, which glosses over important distinctions of time and place and fails to give due weight to the changes which have been as important as the continuities in Lebanese history.

Scruton offers a strong defence of Lebanon's complicated system of politics according to religious confession. The State is not the first cause of loyalty in the Arab world, he remarks:

"it is some other, warmer thing". Lebanon cannot be a fully secularized State, he asserts; only confessional politics correspond to the social reality. On this point, oddly enough, Scruton is in agreement with the Syrians. Syrian armed intervention in the summer of 1976 was intended to prevent the victory of the alliance of Palestinians and the Lebanese National Movement led by Kamal Janbalat, who desired the abolition of the confessional system and the establishment of a secular State (although Hafiz al-Asad believed that he only wanted revenge on the Maronites). The Syrian solution was a modification of the confessional system which would have diminished without obliterating the Maronite ascendancy. Seemingly this solution was acceptable also to the Lebanese Sunni leaders and to the leading Shi'i faction. Probably the Druzes would also have adopted it after the murder of Kamal Janbalat. The opponents of confessional reform have been the secular radicals, the fundamentalist Shi'is and the Maronites themselves. The most powerful Maronite group decided that if they could not have a confessional system with Maronite pre-eminence they would prefer the effective partition of Lebanon and the creation of a Maronite or Christian enclave.

Scruton defends both the ascendancy and the enclave. He argues that Lebanon was better off under Maronite domination. To many outsiders this view would seem very plausible;

Irreconcilable rights

Elon Salmon

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"We know that we are standing at the edge of a precipice in this country . . . but at the same time we must guard the soul of every Jew, and particularly of young Jews, lest they regard the rifle as their god. They must pray for the hour when they can cast away their rifles." Yosef Gorny opens his study with this 1942 quotation from Moshe Shertok (Sharet), who was Israel's first Foreign Minister and, for a brief spell, Prime Minister. That longed-for hour when the young men of Israel can cast their rifles away may never come. The Arab-Israeli dispute has become the most bitter and longest-running confrontation between two peoples (except perhaps that between the Greeks and the Turks) in modern history; it is certainly the most complex. In a conflict of such duration and complexity, neither side can claim that justice is solely on its side. Nor can one side claim with credibility that only its adversary has committed reprehensible deeds. For the propagandist, or for that matter the historian, the wealth of contradictions and sheer mass of events confronting him mean that he can select the material that supports his chosen idea or prejudice. Herein lies one of the chief differences between Gorny's *Zionism and the Arabs 1882-1948* and Michael Palumbo's *The Palestinian Catastrophe*.

From its beginning at the turn of the century, Zionism has never been a monolithic movement. It has contained diverse currents and often contradictory ideologies. At one extreme, the Revisionists, led by Vladimir Jabotinsky, advocated Jewish national assertion which a violent clash with Arab nationalism was regarded as inevitable; at the other, B'nai Shalom, led by liberal intellectuals like Hugo Bergmann, Yehuda Magnes and Arthur Ruppin, sought rapprochement of the two peoples within the framework of a bi-national entity.

Yosef Gorny points out that as a national movement Zionism was "based on certain social and political principles without which its existence would have been pointless and all its efforts in vain". These were the desire for territorial concentration of the Jewish people in

Lebanon was then reasonably free and prosperous, and even those at the bottom of the heap were better off than most other Arabs. Unfortunately it has been plain, at least since 1958, that many Lebanese did not see the matter in that light. These critics claimed a bigger share of the cake partly on the grounds that the population balance between religious communities on which the confessional system was based had changed. Scruton dismisses this last argument; in the first place he contends (against the views of almost all other writers) that there is no good evidence that the Christians are not still as numerous as the Muslims, and that even if the balance has shifted the 1943 distribution of power should remain, because, one infers, only the Maronites can be trusted to run Lebanon as it should be run.

It seems clear, however, that the Maronite-dominated systems of 1920-75 cannot be restored without outside aid; and the last hopes of that ended when, after their experiences in 1982-84, Israel and the United States decided that the goal was not worth the price. Reluctantly, therefore, Scruton falls back upon the Maronite enclave, a purely Christian version of the old Mutasarrifate. The role of the West is to imitate the action of Napoleon III in 1860 and to intervene to induce Syria to concede the existence of such a unit, and (on the model of 1861-1918) to intervene in Beirut and Damascus in order to maintain it.

In the heart of any reconstruction of the

Palestine, its historical homeland; the desire to achieve a Jewish majority in Palestine; the creativity of an exclusive Jewish labour force as a pre-condition for an independent Jewish society in Palestine; and the belief that a renaissance of Hebrew culture was essential for the rebirth of the nation. These, as well as the involvement of the world powers in the region, directly and indirectly shaped Zionist attitudes to the Arabs. Until the clash between Arabs and Jews in the war of 1948, the milestones of this development were the Balfour Declaration of 1917, the rise of Arab nationalism and the riots of 1929, and the Arab revolt of 1936.

Could the conflict have been avoided? In retrospect, as Gorny shows, the answer must be no. The national objectives of the Arabs and the Jews were simply irreconcilable. Yet many of the earliest mainstream Zionists naively believed that once the Arabs understood that the Zionist programme could not be thwarted, they would accept it and even cooperate. Jabotinsky, almost alone among his contemporaries, well understood the seriousness of Arab nationalism. His thinking was therefore directed at a winner-takes-all struggle with the Arabs for the possession of Palestine. The Constructive Socialists, on the other hand, assumed that in essence the problem in Palestine was not a clash of two national movements but a class struggle in which the Arab working class should make common cause with the Jewish against exploiting *effendies* (land owners) and imperialist powers. The riots of 1929 made Zionists realize that an arrangement with the Arabs was not attainable. In 1939 a partition of Palestine was reluctantly accepted by the Jews but rejected outright by the Arabs. By now, however, the fate of European Jewry was the main preoccupation of the Zionists, and attempts at reaching an accommodation with the Arabs were all but suspended.

Mainstream socialist Zionism, which was ultimately the movement which shaped Israel, from the beginning harboured one telling ideological contradiction: how to settle the achievement of a Jewish majority in Palestine with its declared principle that no people should dominate another. Gorny mentions this almost in passing, but goes no further. His research, however, is meticulous, and he has written an extremely useful book which sustains an authoritative narrative about one of the most complex problems to have dogged the Zionist movement.

The Palestinian Catastrophe might have complemented Gorny's study. Alas, it does not. The tragedy of the Palestinians is one of the most terrible of our time. They lost the battle for Palestine because the Jews were better organized, more flexible in their policies, quicker to seize opportunities, but above all determined, to a degree the Palestinians and their unreliable Arab backers failed to appreciate in their inflexible maintenance of an "all or nothing" stance. In the clash, not right and wrong but two irreconcilable rights have been pitted against each other. Palumbo makes the Zionists the villains of the piece, without any redeeming features, without any mitigating circumstances. Thus the early Zionists, he claims, had a close relationship with antisemites because Herzl "believed [they] were the most useful allies for the Zionists". Again, every "Zionist" victory in the 1948 war was attended by rape, looting and more often than not by massacre: "Rape would become a weapon used by the Zionists to terrorise the Arab civilians in Palestine."

It is true that there were excesses on the Jewish side — as well as on the Arab. The massacre at Dier Yassin, perpetrated by the Irgun under the command of Menahem Begin, was the most publicized of such atrocities. At the time, it horrified the Jewish settlement. But according to Palumbo, Dier Yassin was not the exception but the rule.

Most of the atrocities allegedly committed by Zionists which are listed in the book will be new to those familiar with Israel and its modern history, yet the first Arab-Jewish war of 1948 was one of the most extensively reported conflicts of modern times, and it aroused universal interest. Journalists could move about freely. Israel, Palumbo admits, is an open society where few secrets can be kept. Is it possible that so many outrages could have been kept hidden all these years, without even Arab propagandists knowing about them?

Palumbo argues that the expulsion of the Palestinians from their land was executed as a deliberate policy of Zionism. Israel has consistently denied this, claiming that many of the Palestinians left on the order of the Arab High Command. There has been no hard evidence to support this claim. But the fact is that some 350,000 Palestinians from some of the areas which experienced hard fighting, remained. How does this square with Palumbo's claim?

Bias apart, *The Palestinian Catastrophe* suffers from many historical errors. Palumbo refers to Tel Aviv as once a suburb of Jaffa, though it was built by Jews on the sand dunes south of Jaffa and from its foundation in 1909 has always been a purely Jewish town. He describes Moshe Dayan in 1948 as a relatively unknown professional soldier; and refers to the prominent Haifa trade union leader Abu Hushi by the Arab-sounding name Abu Hushi. None of this suggests that Michael Palumbo has done his homework thoroughly.

Lebanese polity must be an agreement between the Maronites and the Shi'is, the latter the least studied of the major Lebanese communities. August Richard Norton's account of the Shi'is, *Amal and the Shi'a*, is a valuable one. Two points stand out from it. The first is the extent of the changes wrought among the Shi'is since the 1950s through urbanization, new leadership and the acquisition of the power of independent action. No one can put the Shi'is back in the bottle. The second point is the commitment of part of the new leadership to Lebanon and its willingness to accept the confessional system. But uncertainty surrounds the attitudes of the diverse religious groups. The struggle for the Shi'i soul is not a simple matter of Amal versus the fundamentalists.

In *Lebanon's Predicament*, a collection of essays by the Lebanese sociologist Samir Khalaf, the point is made that it is not religion but kinship which is the most fundamental Lebanese relationship; the religious community assumes greater importance when people leave the countryside for the city. For Khalaf these primordial ties grease the Lebanese system at the lower levels, but clog it at the higher levels. In most of his essays this fact gives him more cause for satisfaction than for gloom, but in the last essays, written more recently, it brings him to despair. Like Roger Scruton he looks back sadly on a land of lost content. Only his, of course, is a different land.

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The Colonel and the Professor

David Rieff

This is the American moment in world history, the one for which we shall forever be judged. Just as in politics the responsibility for the fate of freedom in the world has devolved upon our regime, so the fate of philosophy in the world has devolved upon our universities, and the two are related as they have never been before. The gravity of our given task is great, and it is very much in doubt how the future will judge our stewardship. [Alan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind: How higher education has failed democracy and impoverished the souls of today's students.*]

I also believe that we must guard against a rather perverse side of American life, and that is the attempt to launch vicious attacks and criticism against our elected officials. President Reagan has made enormous contributions, and he deserves our respect and admiration. . . . In my opinion, these hearings have caused serious damage to our national interests. Our adversaries laugh at us, and our friends recoil in horror. [Lt Col Oliver North, Statement to the Senate and House Select Committee on Secret Military Assistance to Iran and the Nicaraguan Opposition.]

The régime, a term Professor Bloom rather worryingly chooses to employ in his best-selling book, *The Closing of the American Mind* (reviewed in the TLS of July 24), when he means to refer to the government of the United States, has acquired some peculiar defenders recently. In his testimony before the Congressional committee investigating the Iran-Contra fiasco, Lt Col Oliver North expended the best part of his eloquence denouncing the hearings themselves. Not surprisingly, what North meant by democracy turned out to be not much more than a bias in favour of the holding of regular presidential elections; thereafter, the President had the authority to do more or less anything he liked, at least regarding foreign policy. This, as was frequently pointed out to North by his rather plaintive interrogators on the committees, had little to do with democracy, since it held the President to be nothing less than an elected king. North, however, was adamant that the executive branch retained a virtually limitless authority to act any way it liked in the service of the country's interests. While, with an eye on the Grand Jury, he sedulously protested that he had done nothing illegal, North was all too ready to concede that there were times when it was absolutely necessary to do illegal, anti-democratic things (the Colonel favoured the catch-all term "covert activities" but it was a distinction without a difference) if American democracy was to prevail over its enemies. The fact that this way of thinking seemed uncomfortably close to the celebrated remark of an American infantry officer in Vietnam that "we had to destroy the village in order to save it" did not pass entirely unnoticed. But the salient question was not, finally, why a Marine Lt Colonel should have confused the democratic office of the Presidency with the military title of Commander-in-Chief (indeed, the surprise would have been if a Marine Lt Colonel had entertained any other view), but

rather why so many people shared North's notion of democracy as being neither an idea nor a system, but, instead, simply an appellation for the American side, a term as windy and malleable as "the free world".

At the same time, one could not help being struck, throughout North's testimony, by the strange, subterranean heat of the American Right's almost romantic admiration for the Soviets, or, more precisely, for their untrammelled ability to attain their ends. When their hostages were seized in Beirut, North and his admirers seemed to be saying regretfully they took effective action (this was a decorous way of saying they could kill people without having to worry about folks carping back home); you wouldn't see their embassy in Tehran occupied for 451 days, they just wouldn't have stood for it, and so on. With their excess of scruple and deficit of zeal, their dividedness and their nuivity, Americans were failing to get the job done. In a word, they were just too democratic for their own good. In contrast, the Soviets, though doubtless evil, had their act together. The thought was inescapable that North, like so many Washington neo-conservatives, might really have been much happier with a Colonel's commission in the GRU and a dacha in the Crimea. Not for the first time, conservative intellectuals wondered whether, after all, democracy was really compatible with the responsibilities of world power.

To North's defenders, on the committees and off, the Colonel embodied those virtues that as far back as the Romans, have been lauded as "old-fashioned". A Republican Congressman, Rep Henry Hyde of Illinois, explained to North with heavy, sorrowful sarcasm, that the Marine was considered a dangerous person (by liberals) because "you personify the old morality, loyalty, fidelity, honor, and worst of all, obedience. Obedience is out of step with the spirit of the age - [its] *Zeitgeist* - obedience is the opposite of what defines the modern man, which is rebellion." The Colonel stared back gratefully, his eyes glistening under his long lashes, and it was clear that this was indeed the way he pictured himself. The only problem was that, admirable though they might be, none of those virtues Hyde extolled were democratic values. Loyalty, fidelity, honour and obedience are precisely the virtues which give dignity to the military life. In contrast, the defiantly civilian spirit of rebellion that Hyde so excoriated had been the midwife to American democracy - the reason of course for Jefferson's insistence on the people's continuing right to rebellion.

More interesting, perhaps, was the use of the word *Zeitgeist*. Terms like *Zeitgeist* and *Gestalt* are very popular with the American Right these days, which uses them as code words for all the bad news of the modern world (usually seen as having been imported from Europe) that has undermined the nation's resolve, and which, if allowed to continue unchecked, will, in Jean-François Revel's catchphrase, cause the democracies to perish. The explanations

for this impending defeat are as various as the village explainers who offer them. In recent years, there has been a proliferation of think tanks and research institutes, amply funded by right-wing philanthropies like the John M. Olin Foundation and conservative tycoons like Joseph Coors and Richard Mellon Scaife. Whatever variations there are in the analysis, however, the Right's view of what has happened seems marked by a debased Spenglerian conception of decline, attributed to such familiar causes as the failure of American will, the naive refusal of Americans to recognize evil in the world (an evil which of course finds its material incarnation in the Soviet Union); the legacy of the 1960s with its antinomian disregard for established authority and its sexual avidity and tolerance, particularly of homosexuality; a cultural relativism which led to an insufficient commitment to Western civilization. In other words, the whole enchilada, as President Nixon's friend, Bebe Rebozo, used to say.

Colonel North was, of course, a comparatively minor figure in this debate. If he was, however briefly, the poster boy of the American Right (North will learn first-hand of the redeeming fickleness of the American public; those "Ollie for President" T-shirts will soon look as dated as hula-hoops), the movement has also acquired, in those last months of Ronald Reagan's second term, something more substantial - a new *livre de chevet* in which the themes North grasped intuitively, but expressed imperfectly, are given an erudite academic voice. Its author is Professor Allan Bloom, and it does not come as an earth-shattering surprise to discover that he is the co-director of the John M. Olin Center for Inquiry into the Theory and Practice of Democracy at the University of Chicago; vulgar Marxists may draw their own conclusions.

Non-American reviewers, including Kenneth Minogue in the TLS, have tended to view *The Closing of the American Mind* as a scholarly argument about the fate of higher education in America and a lament over the decline of academic standards. In fact, the book is more disturbing.

Professor Bloom, who studied at Chicago with Leo Strauss and remains in most ways a Straussian, is well known in his profession for having made a defiantly literal translation of Plato's *Republic* (in the accompanying commentary, he attacks Comford's mildly modernizing translation for aiming to be accessible), translations of Rousseau's *Émile* and of his *Letter to D'Alembert*, and for writing with his fellow Straussian Henry Jaffa a book called *Shakespeare's Politics*. This bibliography already comprises a sort of programme for the reordering of the world under the tutelage of the master teacher. It is not, to put the matter gently, a very democratic or tolerant view. Not surprisingly, in *The Closing of the American Mind*, Bloom attributes the blame for what has gone wrong in America to what he calls its

Edinburgh Book Festival

Savkar Altinel

China surfaced with some regularity throughout the two-week-long Edinburgh Book Festival (August 8-23), as if to indicate that the enormous range of activities - lectures, readings, signing sessions, appearances by everyone from Yevtushenko and Maya Angelou to a man in a Postman Pat outfit - did not entirely lack an organizing principle. There was Chinese dancing during the opening celebrations, and later Colin Thubron was to talk about *Behind the Wall*, his forthcoming account of his wanderings in China.

Unlike Thubron, Jonathan Raban, who made an unscheduled appearance, resented the label "travel writer". He read two extracts, one from his novel *Foreign Land* and the other from *Coasting*, "a book that normally appears on the non-fiction shelves", to prove that they both were very much works of the imagination. The response of the audience, who laughed just as heartily at the second extract, evidently not bothered that it concerned an evening in Hull with a real (and now dead) man named Philip Larkin, seemed to confirm this - or at least Raban's impressive gift for mimicry. Sadly, the discussion that followed verged on the banal. The only redeeming feature was a reference to the fact that even the sedentary Larkin had once confessed that there was one country he would not mind visiting - if he could come back the same day. It was China.

Two of the authors who came to the Festival were men who left their native countries not for a day-trip but for good. Unfortunately, I could not go to see Ved Mehta but I was there to hear the Sri Lankan-born Canadian writer Michael Ondaatje read from his two most recent collections of poems and *In the Skin of the Lion* (reviewed on p 948), his beautifully written new novel about love, work and exile set in the Toronto of the 1920s and 1930s. The witty and, at times, touching "dramatized entertainment" based on the early life and writings of Kipling by Charles Allen concerned a passage to India, showing the sixteen-year-old Rudyard as Assistant Editor of the *Civil and Military Gazette* in Lahore after his school years in England.

An extremely well-attended discussion on the historical novel, chaired by David Daiches, began with a reference to Scott which the venue as much as the subject seemed to call for. Thereafter, the two participants, Peter Ackroyd and Melvyn Bragg, spoke about their own books, *Hawthorne* and *The Maid of Buttermere*, without saying a great deal about the form in general. Bragg, indeed, did not seem altogether convinced of the existence of such a phenomenon as history, let alone historical fiction. Ackroyd, influenced by Eliot rather than the Lake Poets with their faith in the permanence of "Nature", human and otherwise, obviously disagreed with this, and appeared to be tormented by a sense of time past being at once contained in time present and gone and echoing in memory only. As the terms in which he chose to express himself were rather cryptic, however, it was hard to be sure. "Yes, I can see that", Daiches commented after one particularly obscure remark, but he was probably the only one who could.

A number of events concentrated on the workings of the publishing industry. Most memorably, Giles Gordon and Charlotte Sheedy spoke on the role of the literary agent, claiming that this was now expanding to cover editorial work, as editors in publishing houses on both sides of the Atlantic were spending less time actually editing. David Godwin from Secker and Warburg, who was sitting in the back row, was called on by Hilary Rubinstein in the Chair to answer their charges. This, alas, proved no easy task, and it was Giles Gordon who had the last word. Asked what editors did if they no longer edited, his reply was: "They have lunch

TLS/CHELTENHAM FESTIVAL OF LITERATURE POETRY COMPETITION

From an entry of 4,200 poems the judges - Grace Nichols, Peter Porter, Christopher Reid, Jeremy Treglown and Lindsay Duguid - have shortlisted the forty-six printed below. Readers are invited to make their own choice of first, second and third prizewinner on the ballot form at the foot of this page. Before the outcome of the ballot is known the judges will meet to make their separate selection, and prizes of £500, £250 and £100 will subsequently be given in both categories. The winners will be announced in the TLS of October 9, along with the names of the authors of the shortlisted poems (those wishing to remain anonymous if they do not win a prize should contact the Competition Office at the address below before September 11). The winning poems will be read at the prize-giving at the Everyman Theatre, Cheltenham, at 12.45pm on October 11, after a reading at 12 by Grace Nichols and Peter Porter.

1. From this day on

'From this day on painting is dead', de la Roche.

Those radiant draped dolls who lol in perfection before the camera will follow the hearse of painting, rehearsing their faces. Click. Click. You're dead. They are holding the wake of art in the Grand Salon of Paris, the mourners are in black and white, started and bleached by the flash gun or cropped off by clumsy amateurs as they linger by the door.

The empty house, the car parks, the deserted street corners are waiting for the silent murderers to come in a blur of red, the nudes are getting colder every minute. Diane Arbus is recording the edges of bleak lives and arranging her own death somewhere behind closed shutters on the way to US Highway 285 with her black box in her hand.

The photographer's wife is rarely caught in the act, retreating from lush landscapes and faint markings of lost villages in colours she is not aware of. She crosses his bridges when she comes to them, for the river is his monochrome and hers too. They link steel hands rigidly over waters deeper than they know; not Pont du Gard but Battersea.

2. At Home with the Heavens

Few of us know the sky now. Pissing indoors, How can you learn the dot-book of the stars? Our unilluminated country ancestors Could read it over the shoulders of their lovers, And in dark cities still be astronomers.

Ashamed perhaps, we skip the starry words Of ancient poets - who end a story 'The clouds Have run away, the Bears have reappeared, And once again the vaporous Manger floats Between the Donkeys' - images old and hard,

The lights of strangers. Now we use other signs To pace our lives. And yet - most elements Inside us are the dusty work of suns: We should be recognizing them as cousins, Looking them up, reviving faint connections.

So once, at sea at midnight, told to steer For a number on the card, I chose a star! Caught in the diagram of shrouds, I flared, A rage of light, with something softer, blurred, Beside it. We were led across the seas By both: Aldebaran and the Pleiades.

3. Beach Café: Oporto

Stately on mopeds, the lovers leave to do their homework. An ambulance mourns along the avenue and shadows run like spilled wine beside the empty chairs. A fat woman, crippled, catches perfect dreams, draping a long white thread as the tide runs. The waiter rests on his shield. At last you can hear the sea in the ethal.

My choice of poem is:

(1)	Name:
(2)	
(3)	

Address:

Please post this coupon to: Poetry Competition Ballot, Cheltenham Festival of Literature, Town Hall, Cheltenham, Glos GL50 1QA, to arrive not later than September 18.

4. Saltmarsh

Everything disintegrates In the heat except these shore crabs, Tossed like children's badges on the swept mud, And where there is shadow, it floats, A ragged shirt over the ribs Of silt. I stood on this path once, near mad

With cold, and wind would not let me Pass, flexing like a metal sheet And pushing me back to the road. Today Its dead crabs keep me company And there's no breeze at all to set The liquid horizon. And if I die

Today, where there is space round me And I don't fit, and in this place Which has no end, I would prefer my death To be with the crabs, carelessly Scattered, random as sea asters Or the flight of the redshank, maybe warbs

Exactly what makes them or me Part of this. I'm too close to cool Water even to notice the heat sting Me and too far away to see The sails on old Hainaker Mill Still multiplying nothing with nothing.

5. Berlin-London 1985-6

I was going to write about Anhalter Bahnhof. Sensitive: you know the kind of thing - oh, about the reclining women, one watching, one waiting over the ruined facade for trains that never come. The Wall has made of Anhalter Bahnhof a forgotten memorial in a city of memories, a gift dumped and wrapped in mossy bomb-sites where feral cats observe minutely the movements of passers-by.

We were on our way to the Martin-Gropius-Bau. It squats, a defiant toad, in the angle of the Wall. Within its gaunt plastered walls the Mandarin emperors gleamed, dragonflies in the dark. Beneath the blacked-out skylights

(it's all like wartime here) stretched paintings of weddings long as staircases.

But as I wrote in my head I fell down the stairs of the U-Bahn at Wittenburger Platz. Round and round clattered the train, a child's railway through prison and playpen. Let me present my companions: a drunk who throws banknotes around the compartment and (a real Berliner, this one) a fetishist in nothing but leather coat and lipstick. (The young women snigger. The old feign sleep.) As for me, I'd lost my child. I searched frantically: Kreuzberg, Wilmersdorf, Zoo. But everyone I asked was lost too. And no one had seen him.

When I awoke the trains shunted and shuffled in my head against platforms long as Mandarin weddings. The boy sleeping fitfully in a basket by the bed.

6. The Masochist's Week

Moanday, Tearday, Woundsday, Fearday, Frightday, Sufferday, Stunday.

7. servants of a system

1. a landscape, northern, limestone, a view so breathtaking we couldn't work.

shirts off, writing with the blinds down, closed doors to strangers, reality off-stage and out of sight.

Sundays we spent at the cycle-track watching the sprint.

it was the interpenetration of two distinct civilizations: we could not see their culture as anything but savage and incomprehensible.

even when he explained the joke it added nothing to our understanding.

2. below decks was a world of brass wheels and twisted pipes and dark-stained wood.

the spray tumbling on the decks fell as ice.

it all seemed rather pointless: a great deal of noise from the machines and no time to take breath between phrases.

we spent the last days painting the superstructure slate-grey to make it more difficult to hit.

8. The Car Wash

It takes just the one token to change world and weather.

We are motionless, yet move as the world goes backwards. Then the monsoons commence. Clouds burst and fragments

of nimbus roll towards us. Trembling with apprehension.

you are turned off completely by whole body vibro massage, left cold by the bubble bath and the wheel manicure that

scrubs hub cap and ear drum with a sound that is thunder.

When it starts, it's all over. Covered in every direction

by a thousand water pistols, there is no hope of escape.

The world stops for a second, then comes at us from behind;

changing its gear, then ours. We are motionless, yet move

as the world goes forwards. Now everything is reversed.

After the storm is the calm. You stand in the sun, glowing

proudly. You've come through. I will wipe your face away

9. South Circular

The bird on my ashling - wind-sown down a crack in the yard - flies off, fearing skirmish with buzzards, ring-doves, automatic larks from the humming exchange over the fence: their glass cage has burst open with heat.

Wasps are confused: strawberry air, thick, sweet suffocation, pours out of jam-factory vents. Squadrons assemble for reconnaissance, target me, sunrise, damp school collar: the laundry steams up our sky.

Buses terminate here, idle in queues for showers, fume blight on pavement. The last salvia fails in my mother's petrol-drum, but commoner marigolds push through sand. Soil was slabbed over, interred with drains.

Recalled, a sky navy is hauled in on rigging. Layers of tenants envy our concrete, quarrel in loud serials too blurred to follow. From private houses permitted dogs yap, and yap. Water arcs off the lawns; cur-menders whistle like thrushes after rain.

We break out. She finds cool shade. I walk to Catford's pleasure-boat pond - an island, some thin trees playing at country. Sky-divers scream, swinging up and over the turning map pole umbrella; boys in dogdoms bounce off my slippery canoe. The road roars past on stilts.

Steer aside. Narrows, green danger: growths of drowned hair spread below scum in the creek's funnel. At vanishing point, where cars and water converge, a broken mill, nailed shut round time, draws me out of focus. Gears unmesh, tar lifts in blisters - breath of old fields under heavy afternoons.

Birds scold in willow, tilting the canoe; mind slides down to before this hot world. Falling in clouded water, the sun goes out with a hiss. Shadow mills are unsafe, grind dreams

between granite teeth; their cats cough feather and bone. 'Nine,' calls the hook-man, 'Come back.' On earth, obedient to light, traffic begins. Cooling, I take a bus to the library.

10. High life

It's 'Gigi del Fuego'. Someone giggles. 'Now boys and girls you'd better be good or I'll show you the lot.' Cries of 'nuts'.

The tough looking bouncer is an odd shape and the waitress, is she, is he . . . ? I'm uncomfortable, ambivalent, but sit glued, my palms sweating.

Those palmy days of cabaret and can-can are chipped pillar, moulding velvet, a chandelier that has dropped its tears,

and the audience sits in corners, abandoned each to himself, herself. All's topsyturvy. Gigi, topless and barefoot, dances poker-faced

on bare boards in a circle of lit kerosene, then juggles two firebrands and runs them up and down those silicone limbs, wriggling as the flames lick.

We are inflamed. If the place went up no one would know from the charred remains, who was who or what was what.

I see through to the skeletal dancer. We are sexless in our old channel-house. No logic is what it seems, including my laugh.

Writers for sale

Michael Hofmann

The purchase of individual British publishing houses by large corporations has been commonplace in recent years. None, however, has resulted in a public furor comparable with that caused by the selling of the Hermann Lüchterhand Verlag (Neuwied and Darmstadt), one of the half dozen prime literary publishers in the Federal Republic of Germany, whose authors include Günter Grass and Christa Wolf (and my father, Gert Hofmann). On August 3, the entire Lüchterhand company (consisting of the literary publisher, a printing firm, a bookshop and a law publishing firm) was sold to the Dutch concern Klüber N.V. (Deventer) by its two ageing owners, Eduard Reifferscheid and Heinz Lüchterhand. The part of it that the Dutch had their eye on was the profitable law publishing business, whose acquisition enabled them to create one

of the biggest law publishing groups in the EEC. The German lawyers in Neuwied welcomed the move as a good and useful one. To their literary colleagues, however, it seemed senseless, even malicious in its randomness; while the manner of it, done over their heads - something for which the former owners, not Klüber, were blamed - scandalized them. Subsequent conjecture therefore turned on a possible sale of the literary house to another German publisher: surely the Dutch would soon realize that it was not in anyone's interest for them to hang on to a vocal, troublesome, foreign literary and (probably) loss-making asset they had acquired by inadvertence - a stray cat in the well-stuffed bunny sack? At a meeting on August 11, however, Klüber announced that they would be coming forward with concrete proposals to the authors in a month's time, and that until then it was to be business - ie writing - as usual. This literary goodwill has probably done little to keep the

list of forty writers together.

As Günter Grass has stressed, Lüchterhand is the literary meeting-place of East and West, with close and reciprocal ties to publishers in East Berlin, and many important East German writers on their list. Should such a delicate enterprise be governed by the balance-sheet? Also, Lüchterhand had an author's statute, negotiated by Grass at the time of *Der Butt* in 1976, intended to make it impossible to speculate in the literary careers of the writers. This was simply set aside by the owners as they sold up. It seemed the agreement had no force in law. "I'm ashamed to have belonged for such a long time (over 30 years) to a publishing house whose owners have treated its authors in such a cynical and immoral fashion," said a sad and angry Grass. If that was paternalistic capitalism, what was the corporate kind he liked? One wonders whether the desperately needed certainties of a writing life can be afforded by a speculation based on doubt and greed.

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11. Intercession with a goddess

There may seem more sweat than sanctity
In alien religions, but there's something
Smart and customized in Tokyo city.

Where to Kannon, Goddess of Mercy, they fling
Their one-yeen coins, how and clap their hands
Under plastic blossom of eternal spring;

While the uniformed guide-girl waiting stands,
Her smile and pennant ever at the ready,
For her charges to embark in ordered bands—

Pilgrims keen for blessing on what's already
Gained in their co-prosperous enterprise;
Among them, wounded veterans of heady

Warfare, having failed that inch to paradise,
Present once heroic, now prosaic, slumps—
Free of pity as of thoughts of sacrifice.

A class of yellow-capped infants prinks and jumps,
Each one anchoring a coloured balloon;
Their teacher's masked as if afraid of mumps.

How should the goddess apportion her boon
Of mercy among this bobbing and bubble—
Or does each one get a morsel late or soon?

To point up the divine imponderable
And the constant of human appetite,
The smoke of grilling chicken fat is able

To recall how her temple's proud height
Was brought down by belligerent fire
And rebuilt in ferro-concrete: is it right

Not to recompense plety, their desire
To summon with gong strokes an intervention
Beyond what fortune cookies may inspire?

For the foreigner it's not their intention
That he should understand the Japanese:
There are things he's not supposed to mention

If he wishes in any way to please;
But within myself I cannot but debate—
Using the excuse of local sympathies—

How their inscrutable gods should validate
Divinity by granting rightful prayer
And disavowing what is reprobate.

It may be justified but is it fair
To let petitions hopeful, helpless die
And pop like bubbles in uncaring air?

See: the teacher commands, the infants let fly
Their balloons, with votive message on each tail,
Scattering their full stops round the sky.

May the goddess heed, if texts should fail,
The punctuation of their heaven-sent mail.

12. Suzhou: Guided Tour

This is the Wu garden
built during the Qing dynasty
by General Lu.
There are many old calligraphies
by the Emperor Hu
and an unusual Buddha.

This is the old Lu garden
built during the Yang dynasty
by General Qing.
Here are many calligraphies
by the Emperor Wu
and an unusual Buddha.

This is the pagoda
of the heavenly jade pond.
It has nine storeys
and is built entirely of wood.

Here is an unusual garden
built by the jade emperor
during the period
of the warring pagoda Buddhas.
There are many calligraphies
and a heavenly old Wang.

This Wu
is an unusual calligraphy
built entirely of jade wood
in the early part
of the Thing dynasty.
Note the upside down Bagoda.

In this Lu
General Wang Gong Gong
built a jade pagoda
in honour of
the unusual emperor Xu.

Wu jin hu.

13. Classic Rebuffs Irish Scissorman

'I sharpen things.' A niceish-
looking old boy, Irish
by the sound of him, approaches
my front door; he is slicing
the air between us, pointing
out the business he means.

Business, alarmed, I clutch.
(I'm still half in my book-lined snug, struggling
with Catullus' demented Attis—
tooled leather, 12mo, 15/6).
Too late . . . aculeis
snip snap mili pondera forficibus . . .
Privates bloody the doorstep, painfully public
yelps announce my shame.

But of course it wasn't really like that.

I turned my eyes into stones, English
by the look of them. And stone blunt scissorns.
Blades divined, willing, no good; hopes
fell like swatches of privet
to gravel dustily.
'I have no work for you, I am not afraid.'

At which Paddy withdrew
to the unhappy neighbourhood of his native yew-
tree at my gate (For all I care
he may grind his teeth forever there); and I
letting the gentlemanly silk fly,
danced this mental jig on the doormat:

'After the Taffy collector
of unearned fees,
the Scotch lopper
of unwilling trees—
and many another interloper
and no-hoper—
I've sent Paddy Scissorman packing!'

14. Variations On A Vase Of Tulips

1.
The cool flames stood still in their torch
while each tulip dropped its hot head,
started to spill it faint and scorched.
The cool flames stood still in their torch
of curled water a full foot tall
even when the flowers were dead.
The cool flames stood still in their torch
while each tulip dropped its hot head.

2.
They'd burst from salad bullets
into yellow then burned more slowly.
Green hands in a clear cresset
holding cups of hot orange,
goblets of vegetable film.
In the drops of each was a claw.
At length, they turned towards the table
and spilled themselves.

3.
The fingers of the lamp held out
full glasses of a yellow light.
So long as they could hold them up,
the fingers of the lamp held out
the hearts of soon. There was a drought
that dropped each spider, broke each cup.
The fingers of the lamp held out
full glasses of a yellow light.

15. Colonial Legacy

The runs taught us to sew. 'Use a strong thread,
Double for buttons. Fasten on firmly.
Take small neat stitches, space them evenly.
Faster off well. The back of your work
Should be as neat as the front.'

I am good at needlework,
Although I stopped school in the third grade.
What is the use, for a girl, said my father:
She will only get married.

I make all my own clothes, and the children's.
My mind is away in the bush, fighting for freedom.

When the soldiers came, they were young, and
nervous.
They could amuse their hatred, see our contempt.
Roxby search first, said the sergeant, and his boys
sniggered.

They hitched up their trousers, slung rifles
backwards.
Freeing their hands to fondle our bodies.
Searching for weapons, for papers.

My soldier stepped near me and looked at my blouse.
But my stitches were strong: I chose good material.
It would not tear easily. He ripped harder;
His mates grinned, and he blushed, scowling.
At last I undid the buttons, hating my blouse.

His sweating hands bruised me.

No weapons, no papers.

16. The Returning Knight

We left the Holy Land some time last year,
Even then I was wondering how I could explain
That the boy was dead. Our teeth
Fell out on ship but we were brothers all
And sang hymns to pass the time. Glory
Be to God, glory be. Martha will be old
By now, that must be her face
In the smoke, we've got a hole in the roof.
You see, to let out smoke, but it never does. Smoke

Reminds me of the boy, God rest his soul, God
Is good. I'm real, I'm breathing ox-sweat through
My mouth, I can hear my father's lunatic,
Ancient jester. I can hear the bells. I had gold
But it's gone, let me not awaken to his jibings.

Can't you hear me, Martha, please
Put a little water on my lips. Everything
Is crusting. There was one Saracen girl, heathen
Body, illicit in God's eye, We forced her
Against warm stones, she did stare. Martha,
I've got the key round my neck, soon
I'll open you up and we can properly
Love. Chastity's such a virtue, but it cleaves
To the soul like a cancer, Martha,
Now you can joy again. Can't you hear me, water,
Water, for the sake of God and the Twelve.

There was one hill near Jerusalem, they blinded us
With their scimitars, jewelled curls. We watched
As they came on, Gracful their horses
In a silent dream and we bussed sword-hilts. My chain—

Mail was damp. Great slaughter, that day,
We staggered like drunkards, God is mysterious,
Mysterious are His ways, He must have changed
Sides. That was when I lost my eye.

We're stoning the city with fire, gorgeous
Fingernails of Lucifer scratching the sky in charcoal
And ochre. You should have been there,
Martha, to see that. Martha, listen! Don't push
Me back, listen close, I can speak, but it's slow
And very soft, no, wait, let me rest a while,
Then speak again, you will hear, I want you

To know of the glory, whilst you
Were sitting here.

17. Gauging the pneuma

A Swedish doctor, checking patients before and after
death, has calculated that a human soul weighs 21 g.

It is such a little matter set against
the complexities of the day. Even expiry
can become routine. Relatives' grief
is relative. There are few absolutes;
though the ling is again triumphant among
the smooth rocks beside Lake Vättern.
When dead it lives as peat, animation
less useful than inanition.
Dr Almqvist loves paradox.
It is as pleasing as the gentle whortleberry
which gives itself, like Christ, for
the greater good. Ten patients this month,
fifteen last, before that eleven . . . The conclusions
are becoming inescapable. Averages bang
like an unfastened barn door. His youth
was spent pitchforking hay, collecting eggs,
milking goats. He does not believe
souls are pitchforked into Hell,
that eggs symbolize rebirth—even at Easter,
or that the Devil walks with cloven hoof.
These measurements tell all. The EEG monitor
sits uncomplainingly, a small god.
It speaks day and night. When the blips
phase into a monotonal plateau, quietus
has been reached. Disconnect the oxygen.
There are weightier matters on his mind.
Nurse Bengtsson is summoned. She comes quietly,
high cheekbones betraying Lapp ancestry,
her cool manner redolent of northern winters
so long as to pitch the world into coma.
Calibration and calculation are undertaken
with a minimum of fuss. The warm meat
is still respected; it is his secrets to yield.
'Much as I suspected', he sighs
with gratitude. The exceptions are getting
to prove the rule. He removes his spectacles and sees
Nobel judges convening approvingly.

The Almqvist . . . Really quite remarkable.
Nurse Bengtsson checks his figures with a nod.
He checks her figure thoughtfully then returns
to the cadaver, the chrysalis.

From which the psychic butterfly has flown,
and recalls that 'chrysalis' is from the Greek for
gramme after gramme after gramme.

Reaching home,
you take off your jumper,
turned inside out
in this quick pull,
the seamed knit
frank and naked.

Your coat, hung on a hook,
is still warm in the cold corridor
as I brush past.

The ball of your tights and knickers
lies like a stuffed doll
and the inside print of your blouse
is as pretty as the underside of petals.

With your flushed skin,
you stand like a huge bud
laid bare, a survivor.
I watch
struggling from a trance

21. Trance

20. A Difficult Colour

20. A Difficult Colour

20. A Difficult Colour

18. Scene of the Crime

The windscreen showed him a river, a river,
a refreshing and a mysterious place.
The impulse said stop and stop, and
there were brake-lights in the morning's grace.

You did me no wrong,
but now you are a line in my song.

He stepped down to the bank, the bank,
and he watched the water swirl.
He stood under the willows, willows,
and he saw no girl.

This place has always been empty.
So what did you do with me?

On the trodden grass, the grass
there was a shoe and an empty purse.
Among the footprints he now saw, he saw
his footprints in the earth.

There was nobody here all the time:
you are the scene of my crime.

19. Boogie Woogie

Soap edge shoes slip nine ways
in the gymnasium, awake all night.
We have opened the small windows at the top,
goblets of stars in a blur.

The girls, the fellows on the steps.
We discover the night porcupines
in the grass, the slopes of fireflies.
The geranium gymnasium calls us back.
We cannot sleep. We cannot sleep.

We line up along the walls
in blue chiffon, in tucks and frills,
with sad bony shoulders, in pale lemon shoes
we spin out along the polished floor
all the mosquito folly of the dance.

20. A Difficult Colour

Think of it this way.
Imagine a sea voyage. You have drawn

The boat up on the shingle for the night.
The water is barely luminous.

Someone points into the gloom. On the far hill
they are burning crofts.

The rain comes on again, but softly,
to preserve the sanctity of desecration.

You stand watching the reflections
tremble upon the water.

It's that sort of colour.

21. Trance

The tidal river
threw sheets of ice
over the low-path bank
into the hard meadows,
the shards lying on wire bushes
like the smashed pane
of a burgled window,
the rough fields beyond
empty.

Reaching home,
you take off your jumper,
turned inside out
in this quick pull,
the seamed knit
frank and naked.
Your coat, hung on a hook,
is still warm in the cold corridor
as I brush past.

The ball of your tights and knickers
lies like a stuffed doll
and the inside print of your blouse
is as pretty as the underside of petals.

With your flushed skin,
you stand like a huge bud
laid bare, a survivor.
I watch
struggling from a trance

21. Trance

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22. The bull

Encountering him elsewhere, at a field corner
or under a masking sycamore, nose to his heifer's
tail,

I'd have fled slow as in dreams to the safe side,
heart bucking, apprehension needling
the back of my hand.

Here, leaning over the half-door,
I broke open a bale of sweet leisure, dawdling,
my back in summer, head in cool;
considered him, enjoyed, grew accustomed:
the broad concave forehead,
bulk of neck, mound of shoulder,
darkness weighed against the darkened stall;
constellation; god;
bull that Europa rode, bridling
his splendour with a chain of stars.

I turned,
pulled a sheaf of sour grass and chickweed
growing at the barn wall
and offered it. Then I saw his eyes' uncertain stare,
the dulled metal of his nose-ring
and how his tongue was silmed.
He switched his tail, akin trembling
against the insolence of flies. I was ashamed,
knowing my courage rhinestone; his, uncut opal;
my sabbath locked to his servitude,
my freedom rooted in his dung and mire.

23. Looking for the Celts

The Duchess of Mecklenburg, an eminent
nineteenth-century archaeologist, was responsible
for excavating the graves of Celtic salt-mine workers
at the turn of this century.

He's close. She can smell him. With trembling
hands
sets them aside with the Celtic coins.
She drops to her knees, unaware that her crew
is watching. She scrabbles, gives a blood-curdling
cry

as she touches his chest, his barbarian loins.

The Duchess of Mecklenburg straightens her back.
Her fellow enthusiasts
all digging in soft Salzkammergut rain.
She swaps her mattock for a favourite pick,
glances up at the Hallstatt peak
then, rested, tackles the grave again.

24. The children of lovers are orphans

She bore the babies almost absent-mindedly.
If you have enough, he remarked in his club,
They look after one another.

The children fought for attention,
bit each other, grew up
willfully indigent or grudgingly rich.

Their father, buoyant and busy,
quantified his offspring for *Who's Who*,
easily recalling their names.

She hung over his shoulder reading the entry:
*So eminent, she marvelled,
and look how many children we had.*

25. Better Chaste

I laughed when he told me
And tried to cajole me
into thinking it was for the best
I loved his glances
And made sure he'd no chances.
Of putting his words to the test.
But persistence is winning
And leads to give-inning
Especially when heart rules the head;
Some night after drinking
And without too much thinking
I followed him to lead me to bed.

One thing led to another
And under the covers
We made a pact never to part.
He entered me gladly;
I loved him then, madly—
But then, enter stage-struck, the heart:
That one night of passion
And love, after my fashion,
Was the one night that I knew him so.

Not by this next morning
Gone was all the fawning
Without words he just got up to go.

I much preferred flirting
And eyes as winking
Withholding my self from that time
Better chaste than pursuing
Better thinking than doing
Better unloved than love unobtainable.

26. Daff in the Torre Galatea

26. Daff in the Torre Galatea

26. Daff in the Torre Galatea

26. Daff in the Torre Galatea

26. Daff in the Torre Galatea

I might as well be a mannequin.
Is this silk I'm wearing? Death will be silly.

Mornings they lift me from the bed to the chair.
I might as well be sitting in a Cadillac.

Arturo used to drive me. Now he shaves me.
Maria Teresa reads the papers to me.

I might as well be a clever fake of myself.
They feed me through a tube up my nose.

The wall outside the window looks like Greta
Garbo's lips.

I might as well be dead.

You'd think I was a bathtub. Or a snail.
Is this air I'm breathing? Living is silly.

You'd think I was alive.
I might as well be alive.

27. The Breeding Habits of Books

Never where I saw them last, they shift
around the house at nights and creep up walls,
swap places, spread across the carpets
and breed like mad, even in my bed.

Once upon a time I owned just five or six
and treated them like pets, not understanding
how they multiply. It's far too late
to tame them. Even dead ones copulate.

By day, their spines nudge up against my feet.
I could well suffocate horrifically
in a swarm of books unless I get out quick.
Even my brother infiltrates his paperbacks.

In my mother's house, they're kept inside
a cupboard, out of sight. I like that—
the clarity of uninfested spaces.
Books need to know their place from the start.

Best not to let them in at all but if,
by chance, they drop on to the doormat,
dispose of them at once, or write 'Not known:
at this address' and post them back.

It only takes two to propagate—
and sometimes one's enough (hermaphrodites).
Like worms, the latter reproduce themselves
even in the dark behind locked doors.

I hate to think of all the books I've added
to the secret horror in my mother's cupboard.
Thank God she's never let it out. Our neighbours
didn't even know we had nits or lice.

28. Your shoulder

How palpable, the shoulders of the dead
in dreams.

We waited hours for you. You came
when least expected—I ran to a bus
you had no reason to be on, and there;
white-haired, with heavy cases, bag, spare coat,
you sat. You were in another world, jumped
when I grasped your shoulder. 'Already? Here?'
Why on this bus? Have you lost our address?
What did you tell them? Could they speak English?
Who helped you with your things? Why are you late?
How much further would you have gone? And why
are you bewildered and alone?

Waking,
I felt your shoulder in my hand all day.

29. Castle Taylor

A red plastic bowl on the landing
is collecting doubts. It will offer
a sherry soup of ceiling plaster and rainwater
to a picture's shadow on the wall,
study for 'A Window onto the Real'.

The wretched heir, clutching a substitute
for the prettiest housemaid, shivers
in the State Bed.

Dressed as Diana the Huntress on her head
his ancestor isn't enjoying herself at all
in the spare bedroom.

And all down the Long Gallery—which, if it existed,
would extend right through to No 17—
the bowls are multiplying, the English gamelan
is playing the boring requiem. 'Rain'.

Again.

30. The scream

The hermit crab, white-fleshed, quits her shell:
fingered antennae hover delicately, skimming
the cream of the void.

Down on her knees: a vulnerable bundle
in dressing-gown pink,
a prey to lanceot glances.

One mineswept step completed, she
draws breath, descends, and starts again—then
clink of wedding ring on glass.

An involuntary gasp ices
the thin morning air; ten fingers clasp
a cold and unresponsive neck.

Imagined leers of loons recede,
the world again is held in check as
the choke-chain slides back into place.

For a moment she stands, chiding her
quivering frame. She sniffs—once.
then smooths the silver crown.

In her kitchen she is revived. With programmed ease
she reaches, grasps and pours; a ballcock
or horn-flesh hooking the rim.

Cosy days of Coalport and infusions
preoccupy the mind, while fingers
fish for a tenbag in a mug.

A trailing sleeve unbalances her act.

In a white and jagged pool she stands—
an island of blinding despair—
and blazes heavenwards a glare
of milk-eyed hatred.

31. The Ophthalmologist

We are in a very dark room.
He has the air of one not gone above
For years; his whisper shows
He is completely in command down here.
So I commend myself into his gentle fingers
That play around my head more intimately
Than most men's should do, the trembling
At my ear, the pressure on my temples.
Making me turn profile from side to side.
The touch testing my neck.
He has many categories of sight: ranged
in little boxes, a long, a short, an astigmatism
in a prism of glass. His machinery
Flickers an instant before me, lenses
You'd love to turn in your hand
Like ovals of limestone, waxy as opal.
All the kingdoms he shows me of letters
From the different angles: bold,
Crabbed, melancholic. I peer through
The thicknesses, pitying myself guiltily
Against the deft fingers, the deferential mask.

Half an hour's enough to pinpoint all my
weaknesses:
How to correct blur, squint, failure to see things
As they really are. I've grown to like
The shadowiness with which we work.
How outlines turn to sculpture, the world
Dividing into lamp-light and the dark.
When he throws wide the door, I cannot rise
Towards the greening surface:
Under the desks and curtains the eye-doctor
Offers the lure of many visions.
The honey of his systems underground.

32. The Tale of the Row Boat

They had hired a row boat, one fine day.
The lawyer, the professor and the gynaecologist
And rowed out to the middle of the lake.
Their paddles slashing erratically
Through the patient water's surface
Until they got the hang of it.
To discuss sex, to compare notes.
Experienced men in their fields.

The lawyer had some glossy photographs
Some alluring commodities to pass around
Each girl's anonymous two-dimensional smile
Offered the goods, each position more downright
than the last.

The professor brought along a book of
Perplexing 14th (16th?) century stuff with sexy bits.
He decuded, elaborated and read with so much
feeling

That girls came to the other two faces.
The gynaecologist had some true stories
Almost shocking one could say, a wince here and
there

And some black-and-white clinical pictures
Of female pain to prove his point.

It was then that they noticed
All of a sudden it seemed
The vulva-shaped hole in the row boat
And they knew their Titanic had hit an iceberg.

Again.

33. The Island

Rainfall like radio interference
On the world and waves tucking themselves in
Before they reach land. Needing reference.
I look for the island's reptilian

Head pushing along the horizon, those
Black ridges in the sea as if someone

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36. Trees as men, standing

War was declared, and broadcast
on the string and soap cans round our necks.
The leader raised his arm from Uncle Sam,
and pulled the chrome trigger with elan.
Our hearts went pop. It was a signal to begin
the stomach-churning crowd along the ditch.
Ahead lay Fame and Power.
Some chestnuts stood unconquered by the road.

One by one, we dropped into the stream,
and rubbed our elbows raw
in mimicking Commando Methods of Approach
'as practised in the Eden and Korea'.
Heads keeled above the weeds to check,
or dipped into the mud
with every car that stroled unheeding past,
chug-chugging up the hill to Civic Street.

We crawled - it seemed for hours -
until we came to where they stood -
disguised as woodland, fleeing in the wind
like stormtroopers, or musketeers.
These giants dared the sky with hissing pride.
Each branch had a full complement of twigs.
Their leaves were not for show, but camouflage.

We looked, and resolution drained away,
like water, down the ditch.
The wall was tough to climb, and paved in glass.
The sign above the hurried gate said BEWARE.
On tiring arms, we stopped,
conferring, whispering dares,
until discomfort drove us on,
up our Gulgolha, to the top.

It was a moral victory for the trees
who waved, and sent up birds
to warn at our retreat.
Chartered, we held our soup cans up
awaiting orders, fresh assaults.
Time passed, and still the Leader lay
murderous and silent, lost in thought.
The rasping tins grew warm against our ears.
We couldn't hear a thing in them but wind.

37. The Old in Rapallo

The sea has aged skin, is restless like the old.
There is a flood along this esplanade
Where the cast iron imitation wood has roses
That seep through wrinkles in cracked paint.
Thin flimsy blotches with the bruiser of rust.
I lean on such a railing, take in how the sea
Fritters away its force, loses its grip on weed.
Only the beggars are younger than me here.

Now at forty I remember their century,
Trespass across eight-five odd years
As I try to melt into the clogged procession
That flows both ways at once yet stays
A sluggish river. All afternoon the elderly
Trundle or shuffle, patrol the promenade,
One broad stream without an estuary,
Above the lead-veined, loose-grooved sea.

They all have known what I merely imagine.
Sickled dates that truncated the world,
Erupted its surface. I feel its heavy map.
From the crater over my headstone to the knoll
Of my ankle a vivid trenchwork travels
Only stopping at the salient of my genitalia.
Self-cannibalized, transplanted arteries supply
My reformed, Verdun-assaulted heart.

I have slipped back under the colled wire,
Congratulate myself on clear-down air. Along
The flowerbeds a young gipsy simpers for coins,
An African offers fake ivory. I deal in imitative pace
And posture, a convalescent, transient in the swirl
That's like a set for Swift, a Dante print, a scrap
Of Ezra's prattle as he slung chicken bones
At hull-ribbed cats. When their world was young.

In her draped cheeks I see my lover's flush,
In a drawn waist another arching back.
The blur and trace of beauty hold their own,
Brave the cornice and dare their memories.
Group, dawdle and disband as if this masque
Were the parody and fate of all relationships.
The onshore air is faintly bedroom-scented;
Rocks lick their fingers on the sweetish spray.

The old are close because they're close to death.
I've strolled inside their cavern and been plucked
From the flash tide by a scalpel blade.
Falling like a needle of sheer light. The dark
Will tumble the hipped mountain on the town.
A haze of decades mist its balustrades.
Then the throng will thin to footloose streaks
Loitering under arc-lamps like the years.

38. Doing Italy

*Death's Head nabs a sunbed by seven a.m.
Thon sizes all day! Her daughter (The Blob) is
Loud-mouthed in the shallow end - she sinks like
park.*
Our week begins with Coppertone number 4.

*We buy lunch for the balcony - the juices
Of plum and nectarine puddle at our feet.
When the ants come carrying away those gobbers
Bigger than their bodies, we watch them struggle.
X marks our room. The view from here is massive.*

*My shoulder blades are cracked and flaked like
Naples.
There's bigger all there. Pompeians under glass?
The guidebook guff - Navels brimming with ash.*
Pulsing through the architrave of arteries

*Live bombard us like fingernails, fistfuls
Amount to nothing so we kill time swimming.
Our pool is kidney-shaped - today, lifesteal
With kids. Extra grease and crumbs of skin account
For our new-found buoyancy. - We tread them down.*

39. Othello

Ten years older when we first joined.
You perched upon my youth and settled down,
having scorched your life through deserts of Spain,
shared chicken wings with fat black women on
Greyhound buses,
been jailed in Southern States for your long hair,
written already your Arabian Nights in tidy hand.
Of the Seven Wonders of the World you seemed to
have made five
before I even left school.

No wonder you were my Othello
with your sixties pilgrimages and foreign songs.
Mind more than the city's parts:
my nightclubs, pubs, 'A' Levels and cream buses.
We met in freezing and mysterious parks
and fed on avocados and black-eyed beans.

I slept my first whole woman's night with you:
the sound of the sea and snow falling thickly,
a beach where we floundered waist deep in white
morning.
The landlady called me "wife", I must have looked
about twelve
in the little red coat you bought me.

I was a willing enough Desdemona though,
soaking in your hero's tales,
travelling to your 'Big Sur' and concentration
camps, your Chilean nights.
Our loves always fenced round with books and
poetry,

physical ecstasy translated to John Donne.
You poured years of guilty and delicious knowledge
into days of a rather ordinary teenage girl.

You were a happy enough Othello too:
loved the pale blue white of my eyes,
my child's skin, hated make-up
(I was no Lolita though, you loved my full blown
body).

You desired my lack of depression, my good nerves,
the pure enjoyment I reflected;

My excited sense of future, I made good your past,
gave you freedom to re-do, re-hope, you re-created
yourself from me.

While I sang all your songs, read all your books,
knew the same people, parroted your philosophy,
politics and good taste.

Othello, you loved me to ecstasy. I knew that.
Even when you put your hands around my neck to
kill me.
I knew that you could not bear for me to become old
in the same way as you.

40. Linger

In bed your pregnant belly
gave out a great heat,
the huge vessel resting on its side,
busy as a furnace.

When I reached home, late,
you had just left -
a tepid cup on the table,
discarded shoes.

I embraced with my hands
the dome sides of the kettle,
its base still warm.

41. Echidna

'[Researchers] believe it will eventually be possible
to mix animal, plant microbe and human genes into
animals to produce new, specially designed
creatures.' (Guardian, April 18, 1987)

Not knowing we were strange and naked,
we performed our tasks obligingly,
put out fruit or were inseminated,
in the gardens of those early days.
If edible, we were content to be.

We were not aware that our authors
were children whose own gods
did not know what to do about them.
We were just designer homunculi,
palimpsests upon a bestiary.

When a spark was smuggled to us
in a test-tube, we were pets no longer,
we understood. We knew
that our every word was proof against us,
that silence would not protect us.

Now we are making the Dada mongrels
of their worst dreams, spawning
compound nouns, life-sized harpies
and other unpatented creatures,
in the places they wouldn't look.

Their legends have become real;
they are trying to call up Beowulf,
Rambo, the Argonauts -
while we enlist the aid of their hungry
against the bulldozers and bonfires.

I am the Serpent Girl -
for the moment, resting down here,
remembering the winds in his hands,
the typhoons. And big with clouds now,
I'm day-dreaming of children with wings.

42. Masai Warrior

Sun-up. The savannah country.
Shoulder-high
around him waved,
Hissing with tiny serpents of wind.

As far as eye could see,
Undulating ridges of grass
Islanded with distant trees.
The sun, moored to the far horizon,
Was turning the waves to assegaes of blood.

On the edge of that sea
He fingered his spear-blade,
Hearing the grass-tips
Speaking their language
From time's beginning.

All his fathers had come that way
With no boat built to sail that sea.
He would have to wade through every wave
Watching for snares, bawling the dark forms
Gliding like shades between
The grass-stems' eternal weave.

Somewhere out there
Where dark umbrellas of green
Shaded the parched waters of noon
Rose that fabled island of rest,
Deep and cool as greenest emerald.
That was the place he sought:
The green palace of remembrance
Where the past and all the future shimmered
Alive out there in the vast beyond.

43. My daughter, restless tonight

My daughter, restless tonight,
comes troubled from some dream:
My shadow crosses the dim light
that from the landing lights her room.

Her hair is damp, her eyes
see nothing, open, but their fear.
I am her father, tall and wise,
trying to talk her back to here.

It must be - it is all she knows -
that somehow our world of gestures
noises, implacably roaring, overthrows
the silence, order, promised her.

Her nightmare rides, never
I pray, to join with ours.
What in her innocent fretting fever
in the burning cities, these pillars of

44. The School Party 1962

They closed the school at three o'clock today
And led the children in quaint crocodile
Across the stiles and fields to Uckington
To hold their annual party at the Moat.
Somehow, the sandwiches were cut too large
And thick for children, though they tried a few;
Then buns were huge and lacked the dainty look
Of tea-parties for ladies on the lawn,
Unanimous in the sultry heat
The children were not peasant type at all;
They played their games upon the even lawn
All quite unaware despite the large garden,
The big house and the condescending ways
Of those who gave the party every year;
After the well-planned games upon the grass
Few children wished to take a biscuit home,
Not many wanted food or drink again,
They were not really hungry when they came;
There were no ice-creams, candy-floss or crisps,
There were not even sausages on sticks,
There was no hidden parcel for each child
Nor prettily wrapped gift for taking home;
But when the parents came to fetch their young
They spoke, with bright eyes, of their parties here,
Remembered food and games all down the years
And how they missed an hour of Friday school;
But these well-dressed, well-fed and well-behaved
Young children of the television age
Were not impressed, nor thrilled nor sparkle-eyed.
And one more small tradition passed away.

The air will do something to our skin: burn it
and make us young again. We have arrived
and deployed along the lakeshore a variety of things
each with its special use. The slender children
with special needs pose on the edge of boredom
like archaic statues, inscribing with one toe
a question in the sand. How blue the sky
how green the forest! The light of paradise
makes every leaf particular: the number of things
in the world is finite, and each one of us
has his god-given talent. The great cliffs smile down
and guarantee our happiness.

45. Exile

Guidebooks describe
the water here as 'pristine': that means free
from imported sludges, but the headland hides
a burial ground where dark roots twist among
bones
assembled from three continents. Anyone who
arrives
may claim this as his own: two women
who got here first now furiously repack
their rusted Campavan, but the waves
of immigration beating upon the shore
can't be stopped: already an armada
of powerboats is drawn up along the beach
sharp prows in the air. The air is loud
with transistorized warcries: before the day is out
a head will be bloodied on black obsidian.

Noon shimmers, and a smoke of cooking curis
along the shore. The Brownian motion
of human particles is stilled by an artist
recording it at her easel. We shall be viewed
in the halls of some mid-century exhibition
picturesque and anonymous at our point of passage.
Someone calls for sausages. Crasping a spear
a sharkskinned diver lectures his gaping audience
on the typology of fish. This is exile -
wherever smooth the trunks of trees, renewed
endlessly in the green water, however blue the sky.

Over there on the sand that pale-skinned couple
regard us attentively, as if we might have met
in another country, and exchanged words
heavy with the salt of meaning. But look:
the sun dips and the lake is waiting for us:
where are the thorns on which we must hang our
skins?

46. The Dancer

He can't wait, his
eyes brighten with fragments
of gull and leaping -
a torn love-letter
strewn along the furrows;
For there is no plot here,
simply some deft footwork
on the pedal
as he completes a turn
with a sweet-remembered
reverse chase - this being
the heel and low
of winter ploughing,
keeping the rhythm going.
Already he yearns
for the frail chick
the backward look
of the dancer.

Letters

Hopkins's Verse

Sir, - May I please correct some of the rubbish
included by Tom Paulin in his "review" of my
edition of *Gerard Manley Hopkins*, a book he
has not much troubled himself to examine
(August 14). The case of "The Handsome
Heart" is more complex and more interesting
than he admits. Had he looked at my notes he
might observed that Hopkins made four differ-
ent "fair" copies of the sonnet, more than for
any other poem, suggesting that he was having
difficulty in finding a satisfactory way of
expressing his ideas. Paulin's contrast between
the two versions I printed is exaggerated: they
both have felicities and infelicities. Like him, I
happen to prefer Bridges's amalgamation of
parts of three early versions, but the fact
remains that Hopkins did not. He firmly and
completely cancelled it. One can assume, as
Paulin does, that this was through incompe-
tence, but it may be that we can learn more
about Hopkins by exploring the differences
between his fair copies and asking why he
found the last one in some sense less unsatis-
factory than the earlier ones.

Another of the complexities of Hopkins's
poetry that Paulin does not appear to appre-
ciate is that the insertion of metrical marks,
however minimal, is always going to be a
compromise, "botched" according to one set of
principles or another. No editor has yet had the
temerity to produce a text that uses even the
reduced number of metrical marks from MS B
that Hopkins considered the minimum neces-
sary to stop readers from misunderstanding his
rhythms. I certainly did not print this many in
the text and, although I showed more of them
there than were in the fourth edition, the
difference is nothing like as extreme as Paulin
pretends. (I take no responsibility for the
degree signs - they are simply a feature of the
whole Oxford Authors series.)

Paulin's idea of the "perfect inscape" of
"hours" in "I wake and feel the fell of dark, not
day" is based on misunderstanding. He sug-
gests that Hopkins means to bring to mind the
inappropriate image of a "demented hellfire
preacher terrifying his congregation at the
thought of eternity and damnation" by "rub-
bing his nose" in an Ulster "ur-sound" which
he thinks Hopkins indicates through an unlaut
that he finds in the fourth edition and which I
"amazingly drop". Had he bothered to look in
the notes to either edition, he would have
found that there is no unlaut, but a quiver or
"circumflex". This mark, as can be seen from
my notes, is not rare in Hopkins's verse nor
restricted to those poems written in Ireland; he
used it for "sour", for example, in the Welsh
sonnet, "Pied Beauty", written nearly seven
years before he went to Dublin. The unlaut in
the fourth edition was almost certainly in-
serted, as Roy Fuller suggests (Letters, August
25), to turn the line into a pentameter. But in
many of the other cases where Hopkins uses a
"circumflex", this interpretation would pro-
duce "pentameter" lines of eleven or more
syllables, so again there would appear to be
more to be investigated. If, instead of regard-
ing Hopkins's metrical signs as an "agonized
gamut", Paulin actually studied them as the
guides to performance that the poet intended,
he would doubtless find among their complex-
ities numerous subtleties of pronunciation
and rhythm.

Your reviewer describes the notes to the
fourth edition as "excellent and much fuller"
than mine, and in some cases they may be. But,
as I gratefully acknowledged, they were the
starting-point for my own and, inevitably,
since I had the benefit of them and of the
twenty years of research on Hopkins that have
been done since they were produced, there are
other instances where mine are more compre-
hensive and up to date. It also seems to have
escaped Paulin's notice that one criterion for
choosing selections from the prose was to give,
in full, passages helpful to an understanding of
the poems. Cross-references to these are
placed in my notes at the appropriate points.
Let me, finally, set my edition in context. It
was put together in the awareness that scho-
larship on Hopkins is about to enter a new
phase with the publication of N. H. Mac-
Kenzie's volume of facsimiles and Oxford
English Texts variorum edition. One charac-

teristic of this new era will be a wider and more
knowledgeable discussion of what Hopkins
actually wrote than has occurred previously.
My edition is not insensitive, quite the con-
trary; it was prepared for undergraduates who
will be trained during this new phase and for
scholars willing to extend our knowledge of
Hopkins. However, the Oxford Authors *Hop-
kins* and the two forthcoming editions need
readers (and reviewers) whose genuine in-
terest in Hopkins enables them to recognize
the opportunities for new understanding that
they offer.

C. L. PHILLIPS,
School of English, University of Exeter, Exeter.

Appraising Translations

Sir, - Despite his numerous erudite references
to a variety of translations in several languages,
Roy Harris's article, "The ephemerality of
translation" (August 28), seems, in the end,
rather threadbare.

As one who has published translations from
French, Russian, German, Danish and Yid-
dish, I find he leaves the crucial question
unposed: how many of those who read works in
translation are thoroughly, or even noddingly,
acquainted with the original text, and even if
they were, would they care that much about the
fidelity of the rendering, its ephemerality,
contemporaneity, etc. etc? And as regards
interpretations or appraisals of any particular
piece of translation, the old tag *quot homines
tot sententiae* has deadly relevance. Or perhaps
Diderot's cynical comment on the subject is the
most apt: *il n'est pas nécessaire d'entendre une
langue pour la traduire, puisque l'on ne traduit
que pour des gens qui ne l'entendent point*.

STEPHEN CORRIN,
10 Russell Gardens, London NW11.

'Anti-Calvinists'

Sir, - In springing to the defence of Nicholas
Tyacke's *Anti-Calvinists*, Conrad Russell (Let-
ters, August 21), is being less than fair to your
reviewer, Kevin Sharpe. Professor Russell is,
of course, entitled to the view that Tyacke's
book represents a landmark in early Stuart
religious history rather than just the useful
contribution suggested by Dr Sharpe, but in
accusing the latter of limited understanding of
the case put by Tyacke he seems to be
confusing lack of agreement with lack of
comprehension. Moreover, two of the more
serious criticisms raised in the review are not
tackled: that in the case of many churchmen
and laymen the evidence for their being firmly
identified as "Calvinists" or "Arminians" is not
very substantial, which weakens the case for a
new two-party model to replace the old
"Anglican"/"Puritan" one; second, that the
division of informed Englishmen into Calvinist
sheep or Arminian goats does not do full
justice to the many subtle variations of doctrinal
belief, liturgical practice and pastoral tech-
nique within early Stuart Protestantism that
have emerged from research in recent decades.

Tyacke has done a valuable service in
highlighting the perception of some headline
Calvinists that their opponents had "moved the
goalposts" by redefining Puritanism as Calvin-
ism, a perception which some laymen shared,
and, if they were convinced by these Calvinists'
assertion that their opponents were closet
papists, were prepared to act upon at times of
anti-Catholic panic. But there was another
contemporary perception - that it was the high
Calvinists who from the 1590s, if not before,
had been trying hard to move the posts by
pushing England's official doctrinal stance
closer to that of Beza's Geneva than it had been
under Edward VI or at the time of the
Elizabethan Settlement. The perception re-
vealed by Tyacke may have been fairly wide-
spread and politically significant at certain
times, but how widely was the opposite view
held, not just by the vocal "anti-Calvinists" but
by many moderates as well? In his last sentence
of Russell concedes that there is still "plenty of
room for debate" on this subject - an invitation
which should surely be as open to your
reviewer as to the author and those who accept
his views.

IAN GREEN,
Department of Modern History, The Queen's
University of Belfast, Belfast.

'Disastrous Twilight'

Sir, - Having served with British troops in
India and South-East Asia between 1944 and
1946, I read with interest the review (August
28) of Shahid Hamid's book *Disastrous Twi-
light*. Your reviewer notes that, in 1947,
Auchinleck "would have deployed troops from
the British as well as the Indian Army to try to
keep the peace". Was this not an example of
Auchinleck's lack of political sense, mentioned
elsewhere in the review?

Whatever may be thought of the last
Viceroy's approach to Indian affairs, Lord
Louis certainly had a good insight into the
mood of the British servicemen who had been
under his command during the war with Japan.
Once that war was over, the ordinary soldier
resented every extra day he spent "out East".
His family back home probably felt the same,
or even more so. To have kept British troops in
India for internal security purposes, or to have
sent out additional troops, would have been
politically impossible for Attlee's government.

Nor was unwillingness to engage in further
action after VJ Day, seen as irrelevant to our
interests, confined to the "other ranks". I
recall an incident in Singapore in early 1946
when Dutch refugees showed hostility to
British soldiers. The commanding officer of a
battalion which had helped people like them to
escape from Sumatra explained to me that they
resented our failure to launch a vigorous
offensive against the Indonesian nationalists.
As for him, he said, he had lost many men

during the Burma campaign, and, each time, it
had been his duty to write a letter to the next of
kin. He did not intend, if he could help it, to
write any more such letters.

BRIAN PEARCE,
42 Victoria Road, New Barnet, Hertfordshire.

Gustav Mahler

Sir, - With reference to Norman Lebrecht's
letter in your issue of July 3, in which he states
that Gustav Mahler's house in Vienna "has no
memorial plaque", that he is "unmentioned in
tourist literature" and that apart from Rodin's
bust in the Staatsoper "visitors would be
unaware that he existed", I have sent Mr
Lebrecht photocopies of the chapter on
Mahler from my guide-book *Wien Spezial:
Musik um 1900* (1984), in which mention is
made, among many other things, of all the
houses he inhabited and of the memorial
plaques both on his Vienna house and on the
Konzertthaus.

The many tourists who have bought the
book since its publication will, presumably, be
better informed than Mr Lebrecht.

CHRISTIAN M. NEUBEHAY,
Annagasse 18, Vienna.

The Eleventh International Congress on Aes-
thetics will be held on August 29 - September 2,
1988, at the University of Nottingham. Full
details are available from Yvonne Harrison,
Trent Polytechnic, Nottingham NG1 4BU.

AMONG THIS WEEK'S CONTRIBUTORS

Tom Altken's novel for young people, *Water Lane*, was published last year.
Vernon Bogdanor is the editor of *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Political Institutions*, published later this
month, and of *Representing the People: Parliamentarians and constituents in Western democracies*, 1985. He is
a Fellow of Brasenose College, Oxford.
Graham Bradshaw lectures on English literature at the University of St Andrews. His book *Shakespeare's
Scipion* was published in June.
Yoram Bronowski has translated Borges, Cortázar, Ortega y Gasset and Neruda into Hebrew.
Gordon Brotherston's books include *The Emergence of the Latin American Novel*, 1978. He is Professor of
Literature at the University of Essex.
John Campbell's most recent book is *Nye Bevan and the Mirage of British Socialism*, published this year.
Stephen R. L. Clark is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Liverpool. His most recent book, *The
Mysteries of Religion*, was published in February.
George Craig is Reader in French in the School of European Studies, University of Sussex.
K. G. Davies's books include *The North Atlantic World in the Seventeenth Century*, 1974. He is an Emeritus
Fellow of Trinity College, Dublin.
Roy Foster's books include *Lord Randolph Churchill: A political life*, 1981. His *Modern Ireland 1600-1972*
will be published next year.
Peregrine Hodson is the author of *Under a Sickle Moon: A journey through Afghanistan*, 1985.
Michael Hofmann is the author of two collections of poems: *Acrimony*, published last year, and *Nights in the
Iron Hotel*, 1983.
Albert Hourani's books include *The Emergence of the Modern Middle East*, 1981, and *Europe and the Middle
East*, 1980.
Michael Hulst is the translator of *Essays in Honour of Elias Canetti*, published last month.
Michael Ignatieff's books include *The Needs of Strangers*, 1984, and, most recently, *The Russian Album*,
which appeared in May.
Mick Jinks's pamphlet of poems *The Zoologist's Bath and Other Adventures* was published in 1982.
Arthur Jacobs is the author of *Arthur Sullivan: A Victorian musician*, 1984, which was reissued in paperback
last year, and editor of the fifth edition of the *Penguin Dictionary of Music*, 1978, which first appeared under
his editorship in 1958.
Louis James's books include *Jean Rhys*, 1978, and *Islands in Between*, 1968. He is Professor of Victorian and
Modern Literature at the University of Kent at Canterbury.
Demond King-Hell's books include *Satellite Orbits in an Atmosphere: Theory and applications*, to be
published this month, and *Observing Earth Satellites*, 1983.
Eric Korn is an antiquarian bookseller in London.
David Malouf's books include the collection of stories, *Antipodes*, and *12 Edmondstone St.* both published in
1985.
Martin Meredith is Research Fellow in African Studies at St Antony's College, Oxford. His account of black
Africa in the post-war era, *The First Dance of Freedom*, was published in 1984, and his study of post-war South
Africa is due to appear next year.
Michael Neve is a lecturer in the History of Medicine at University College London.
Ben Pimlott, Professor of Politics and Contemporary History at Birkbeck College, London, is the editor of
The Political Diary of Hugh Dalton 1910-1940, 1945-1960, published last year.
Peter Porter's most recent collection of poetry is *Fast Forward*, 1984. His *Collected Poems* appeared in 1983.
Nicholas Parcell is Fellow and Tutor in Ancient History at St John's College, Oxford. He is joint author of *The
Mediterranean World: An examination of long-term themes in Mediterranean history*, to be published later this
year.
David Rieff's *Going to Miami* has just been published in the United States.
Elon Salmon has been writing on the Middle East and Israel for *The Economist*. His book *The Gate of Hope* is
published this week.
David Sedley is a lecturer in Classics at Christ's College, Cambridge.
Peter Smith is the author (with O. R. Jones) of *The Philosophy of Mind*, 1986. He is a lecturer in Philosophy at
the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth.
Randall Stevenson is a lecturer in English Literature at the University of Edinburgh, and author of *The British
Novel Since the Thirties*, 1986.
Michael Tanner is a lecturer in Philosophy at the University of Cambridge. He is compiling a complete
disography of Richard Wagner.
E. S. Turner's books include *An A.D.C. of Nostalgia*, 1984. He has been a contributor to *Punch* for over fifty
years.
Marina Warner's *Monuments and Maidens: The allegory of the female form*, 1985, was reissued in paperback
in February. She is at work on an introduction to the writings of Leonora Carrington, the Surrealist, which
include her classic account of madness, *Down Below*.
Peter Warren is Professor of Ancient History and Classical Archaeology at the University of Bristol. His
books include *Aegean Civilisations*, 1975; he has been director of excavations on Crete at Myrtos, Deblos and
Knossos.
Jason Wilson is the author of *Octavio Paz*, published last year in the Twayne World Author Series. He is a
Visiting Lecturer at King's College, London.
Malcolm Yapp's books include *Straightjackets of British India: from 1798-1850*, published in 1980.

COMMENTARY

Striking successful poses

Roger Kimball

Gilbert and George: Pictures 1982 to 1986
Hayward Gallery, until September 27

When the time comes to write the history of late twentieth-century art, the phenomenon of Gilbert and George is sure to receive notice – though not, I am afraid, for any artistic contribution that the London artists might be supposed to have made to the period. On the contrary, attention will probably centre on their extraordinary career, on their ability to make successful artistic capital out of aesthetically meagre elements. Their prominence in the London art world this summer is a good measure of their abilities in this regard. A large exhibition of their recent work, *Pictures 1982 to 1986*, is concluding its European tour at the Hayward Gallery; Anthony d'Offay, their London dealer, has devoted both of his galleries on Dering Street to their work; a hefty catalogue, *The Complete Pictures: 1971–1985*, which includes a long and fulsomely celebratory essay by the critic Carter Ratcliff, has appeared to accompany the touring exhibition (308pp, with 596 illustrations, Thames and Hudson, Paperback £14.95, 0 500 274436); and a seventy-minute film, *The World of Gilbert and George*, written and directed by the artists in 1981, plays repeatedly throughout the day at the Hayward Gallery.

Who are Gilbert and George? The catalogue does not divulge their surnames, but it does tell us that they were born, respectively, in the Dolomites, Italy, in 1943 and Devon, England, in 1942. In 1967, the two met and studied at St Martin's School of Art in London. They soon made a reputation for themselves in vanguard circles, in part for performances they dubbed "living sculptures" – where, for example, they would stand on pedestals pantomiming to a popular tune for eight hours – but largely, one suspects, for their whole approach to art.

The children of Michelangelo

Peter Porter

Good Morning, Babylon
Lumière Cinema

The disappointments of the new film by Paolo and Vittorio Taviani are so many that you are moved, out of respect for its directors, to discover themes and consequences of more arcane interest. After all, the creators of *Padre Padrone* and *La Notte di San Lorenzo* have earned the gratitude of filmgoers the world over. Since seeing it, I have been seeking some formula to divert my opinion that *Good Morning, Babylon* is a sentimental adventure story which manages to be, at the same time, a mawkish tribute to the cinema industry itself. What must its redeeming subtext be? Well, it is plain enough, though I doubt that it brings much redemption. It is the glorification of Italy, and especially of Northern Tuscany, where the Taviani brothers come from. Underlinings and hints keep Italian life and culture before your eyes throughout the long progress from Pisa to Southern California of two brothers who are craftsmen stone-carvers and who arrive in Hollywood to work for D. W. Griffith on *Intolerance* in 1915. It is a knowing and sometimes a moving catalogue.

Encountering a train in the American desert, the brothers hear the most unexpected sound, a group of Italian artists singing "La Vergine degli angeli" from *La forza del destino*. Isolated on the banks of a creek in Hollywood, one of the brothers, Andrea (Joachim de Almeida), exorcizes his contempt for America by clashing together the cymbals he had played in a Tuscan band, and, creeping in behind him on the score, instrument by instrument, comes the overture to *La gazza ladra* until it swells to a triumphant tutti, excluding all else. At this point, the brothers are looking after caged birds for the property department, and passing love notes in broken English to two actresses. While they pen them, a magpie flips among their papers. Categorized by an all-

While they have never abandoned the idea that they are sculptors, in 1971 Gilbert and George began exhibiting photographs and have since produced a seemingly endless series of "photo-pieces" that chronicle their lives and obsessions. Early "photo-pieces" would typically consist of several black-and-white photographs in which arty views of empty rooms or parks or urban scenes alternate with photographs including the artists, singly or together; a favourite subject was alcohol, and many, many pieces are devoted to depicting gin bottles, glasses and Gilbert and George in various states of inebriation. As Ratcliff explains, they understood drinking as a "duty": "As living sculptures, they believed they had to inflict 'deconstructivism' upon themselves as well as their photo-pieces."

Gilbert and George's recent photo-pieces tend to be large, brightly coloured squares or rectangles formed by joining together many individually framed images; at the Hayward, some pieces cover an entire wall. While the artists still appear in most of these works, they are now often joined by an assortment of tough-looking young men; many pictures consist of huge stylized images of male sexual organs. Various religious and "existential" themes now compete with alcohol, excrement and homosexuality as favourite subjects, and hence we get an abundance of works with titles like "Beiler", "Faith", "Death", "Drunk With God" and "Life Without End".

The artists have hardly been shy about proclaiming the importance of their work. "We believe our art can form morality, in our time," George tells us in one typical statement. "Our art is based on human life. All the important subjects of existence are involved," Gilbert says in another. Nor have they suffered from unduly circumspect admirers. Simon Wilson, for example, who contributes a pamphlet for the exhibition at the Hayward, assures us that Gilbert and George have "come to be seen as being among the leading artists of their genera-

American props man as work-shy Wops, the brothers apostrophize themselves as the sons of Michelangelo and Leonardo. After the papier mâché elephant they have made is destroyed by rivals, their friends show a footage of it on film to Griffith, who jumps up exclaiming, "I want eight of those elephants." Here the model is Vasari, another Tuscan, who liked to describe how such shepherd boys from the Mugello as Giotto and Andrea del Castagno were discovered drawing on rocks by Florentine talent-scouts. Pisan Gothic provides the final apotheosis. The brothers are dying on the field of Caporetto in the First World War. They have a vision in which a small Romanesque church on the smoke-filled battlefield merges into the full glory of the facade of the Duomo in Pisa, with medieval carvers working in bright sunlight.

Both de Almeida and Vincent Spano, who plays Nicola, the second brother, are fine enough actors to carry our sympathy through many clichéd scenes, and Omero Antonutti is as commanding a father as he had been a menacing one in *Padre Padrone*. (He also reinforces the Italian connection with his striking resemblance to the elderly Verdi.) The English-speaking actors are less sure of aim, though Charles Dancemakes a poised and sardonic Griffith. The sets and locations are disappointingly sub-Tuscan, and whenever Nicola Piovani's score is not quoting Rossini and Verdi it is banal. The overt message of the film is delivered by Griffith when he likens film makers to the men who built the Romanesque cathedrals. The brothers' dying act is to film each other for their sons to remember them by. The Taviani's modern camera fingers on the old hand-wound movie camera lying on the battlefield, but a better image of the immortality of film might be the ridiculous property elephant burning to the ground, or the equally absurd elephants flickering distractedly on the screen of Griffith's colossal Babylon. The Taviani's of San Miniato, and, indeed, D. W. Griffith himself, work at a more ephemeral level than the anonymous sculptors of Pisa.



"Militant 1986" by Gilbert and George, from the exhibition reviewed here.

tion" and that the young men in their later pictures are "equivalents, performing the same function in art, of the classicizing male figures of Michelangelo and Raphael".

One may be tempted to compare Gilbert and George to Oscar Wilde and say that they have put their genius into their lives and only their talent into their work; but the difference between them and Wilde, alas, is that Wilde was possessed of discernible artistic talent, while Gilbert and George excel only at histrionics. Instead of producing art, they produce gestures that appeal to the capricious and evanescent enthusiasms of the art world. They were "performance artists" in the late 1960s when performance was the latest avant-garde hope of superseding traditional art; in the 1970s, when despair and sexual excess were tokens of artistic election, they were drunkards and homosexual crusaders; now they have taken up a confection of social clamouring and pseudo-religious ideas. ("Red Morning", Gilbert informs us, "is completely Shinto. To do with nothing.") The only constant is an arch, ironic sensibility that regards every artistic, intellectual, or spiritual achievement as material for

Relishing the Blitz

E. S. Turner

Hope and Glory
Odeon, Leicester Square

Evoking childhood has its hazards. A few years ago a mother sued her son for libel, complaining that his autobiography depicted an over-deprived upbringing. John Boorman's *Hope and Glory*, a screen comedy based on his boyhood in the Blitz, is a tale of imperfect family life, but he assures us that his octogenarian mother was concerned only that the actor playing her husband was not handsome enough. Boorman, who made *The Emerald Forest*, amply documents the film he wrote, produced and directed. His script, published by Faber (160pp, Paperback, £4.95, 0 571 14983 9), is sandwiched within a family memoir, with social reflections on pre-war life in lower suburbia, and there is an appendix on the financing operation ("Listen," he said, "I don't have time to read it, but if you like it, I like it. You don't want to make a flop, nor do I. How much?" – "Nine point five," I said. "And so on.")

Inevitably the epigraph to the enterprise is the late Laureate's "Come, friendly bombs, and fall on Slough", but the original scene was Carshalton; that land of the rising sun as displayed in the design of garden gates and stained-glass windows. In a Rosehill Avenue semi lived the Boormans and in the screen version of it live the Rohans, who stop sparing only when the radio plays the Anthem, or when the King utters his Christmas message. Clive, the father, like Boorman's father, was a young pig-sucking subaltern. In India in the earlier war and led his men against the Turks with a sword, but he hardly gives this impression; joining up again to fight Hitler, he is refused a commission and becomes an Army squire. His wife Grace had always fancied her best friend Mac, now in a reserved occupation. In brief encounters Mac helps her to look after wayward fifteen-year-old Dawn, who is out-

Bill and five-year-old Sue. It is through Bill's eyes – the eyes, as it were, of young Boorman – that we relish the Blitz.

Such is the pace of the film that good scenes are sometimes lost in the rush. Friendly bombs fairly rain on Rosehill Avenue, which soon resembles the Ypres Salient with stretcher parties outlined on the red skyline. Juvenile gangs run amok, amassing jewellery and exploding live ammunition. The qualification for joining a gang is a knowledge of dirty words and Bill happens to know, and is persuaded to say, that "special word", which qualifies him to line up to peer into the knickers of a bored girl.

The Blitz is more fun than school. Bill is caned for being fractionally late for roll-call after a heavy raid. Shots of him winning are alternated with glimpses of the headmaster in assembly bawling to God to strengthen Churchill's right arm. Farce comes tumbling after, as juniors in gas-masks recite multiplication tables. Other scenes are more credible: the neighbourhood barrage balloon descending on the roof-tops, a German pilot parachuting down from a dog-fight.

Hope and Glory is no fount of social significance or historical truth. It is essentially a nostalgic exercise with a high-spirited, if sometimes uneasy, charm. The womenfolk seem an unbuttoned lot for those days and young Bill's nose is for ever being rubbed in their intimacies. As played by Sebastian Rice Edwards he is neither a William nor a wimp, just a boy who would rather be practising googlies with his father (David Hayman) than painting seams up his big sister's legs, or listening to her belly. Sarah Miles as mother has too little time for her big scenes, like aborting her children's evacuation to Australia, or having furious rows with Dawn. Ian Bannen's wickedly crusty grandfather inveighs spiliably against female excess. Whether it adds up to a true family picture hardly concerns the rest of us; Boorman, if dissatisfied, can always sue himself. The Blitz is joyously overdone. All it lacks is the man from "Mass-Observation" judging after-raid

The essence of ensemble

Graham Bradshaw

SHAKESPEARE
Troilus and Cressida
BERTOLT BRECHT
The Caucasian Chalk Circle
King's Theatre, Edinburgh

In an interesting but enigmatic programme note Manfred Wekwerth, who directs the Berliner Ensemble's *Troilus and Cressida* and also prepared the translation used, refers to the play as "one of the loveliest but also strangest plays William Shakespeare ever wrote". Everybody would agree about its strangeness, but what kind of "loveliness" is in question?

Part of the answer is provided by Corinna Harfouch's extraordinary performance as Cressida. She is at once *farouche* – an awkwardly angular, anxiously posturing adolescent – and intensely vulnerable, as she struggles to make sense of her own awakening sexuality in a world distorted by years of siege warfare. It is equally impossible to sentimentalize her, or to see her merely as an object of knowing derision.

If that catches the play's complex tonality, other surprises are more problematic. Pandarus is asetic and nervy, not at all the familiar lubricious "voyeur. Therites" ferociously reductive verbal onslaughts are less obviously "compensatory" in the Adlerian sense, since this sturdy Therites is also able to hold his own physically – with a Patroclus if not a Hector. And many of these surprises come as pressing reminders that it is curiously difficult to determine what is too fundamental to be changed or reinterpreted without doing violence to the play's identity.

For example, the sardonic verse prologue is delivered by Therites. Hearing Ekkehard Schall speak is always a pleasure and usually a revelation, but this would seem odd to anybody who thinks it matters that Therites always speaks prose, and prose of a levelingly reductive, foul-mouthed kind. In his revolutionary translations August von Schlegel understood that in poetic drama the kind of verse or prose a character speaks is itself a constituent of dramatic meaning. Wekwerth would presumably dispute this, both as director and translator; but then how many British directors or actors or critics would think it worth remarking that Therites – or, say, Falstaff – is confined to prose?

Having a diminutive Ajax yields some wonderful comic moments; but having Hector brush Ajax to one side like a fly is at odds with the very first – and typically contradictory – information the play provides about Hector. In the second scene we hear that this supposed model of chivalry, whose patience is "as a virtue fixed", has been abusing his wife and striking his armourer after being knocked down by Ajax on the field.

AUTHOR, AUTHOR

Competition No 345
Readers are invited to identify the sources of the three quotations which follow and to send us the answers so that they reach this office not later than September 25. A prize of £20 is offered for the first correct set of answers opened on that date.

Entries, marked "Author, Author 345" on the envelope, should be addressed to the Editor, *The Times Literary Supplement*, Priory House, St John's Lane, London EC1M 4BX. The solution and results will appear on October 2.

1 "This truth came borne with bier and pall.

"I fell it, when, I sorrow'd most.
"Tis better to have loved and lost,
Than never to have loved at all."

2 What voice did on my spirit fall,

"Fie, when thy bridge I cross?
"Tis better to have fought and lost,
Than never to have fought at all."

3 "Yes," said I, "you have been inoculated for marriage, and have recovered."

"And yet," he said, "I was very fond of her till she took to drinking."
"Perhaps," but is it not Tennyson who has said: "Tis better to have loved and lost, than never to have loved at all?"

At the end of the play Achilles puts down Hector like a rabid dog, without regard for the Trojans' medievally-minded notions of honour and such "tush"; and in Wekwerth's production there is a stunningly theatrical coup. For a moment it looks as though Achilles will spare the unarmed Hector. The Myrmidons are nowhere in sight, and are revealed only when the grateful Hector backs through a curtain – to where the Myrmidons wait, before fixing their spears in Hector's back like a porcupine's quills. Yet we have already lost the scene in which Hector spares the tired Achilles, and that strangely grisly moment when, after chasing the unnamed Greek "for his hide", Hector opens the coveted armour to find an already "putrefied core". And we come perilously close to losing the dramatic point of that whole, sudden development in which – in a play where so many elaborately evolved schemes come to nothing – the grieving Achilles plans and accomplishes the murder of Hector within minutes. The war and the play are both effectively over as soon as Achilles refuses to treat war or indeed love as a "sport".

Three years ago, the company's performance of *Galileo Galilei* was dominated by Schall, who is by any standards a supremely great actor. But for this visit plays have been chosen in which no single actor dominates. I do not expect to see *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* better performed, anywhere, ever; but this is above all a triumph of group playing. Moreover, the economy of the Berliners' staging offers a timely reminder that the essence of great drama need not involve the expense of subsidies in a waste of spectacle. The *Troilus* set consists of little more than the huge bare platform, a rude gangplank, and an immense white sheet with which the company work a series of intoxicatingly suggestive miracles – doubling it up to make the balcony from which Pandarus and Cressida review the procession of heroes, rolling it up to make a tree, spreading it out to serve as Achilles' tent. In the Brecht the use of the barest props also summons to the imagination. Little canvas "huts" are carried on; Grusche's ordeal in the mountains is stunningly conveyed by chillingly grey lighting and rude one-dimensional canvas "boulders" topped by white rags of "snow".

More generally, the company is wonderfully faithful to Brecht's own relishing of human types and behaviour. There are magnificently pointed vignettes – an unforgettably funny Jesup for example, bullying Grusche from his wooden tub, and a dehumanized, neurasthenic Governor's Wife, who has to be revived by smelling salts whenever Azdak or a villager come within range of her shrinking nose.

To cavil at the age of these productions would be ungrateful. But they are not new: the *Troilus* dates from 1985, the Brecht from 1976. That is another reason to anticipate this great company's latest Shakespeare project, when Schall will play Timon: let us hope this finds its way to Britain.

Contemporary chanel

Patricia Craig

PETER REDGROVE
Grimms' Fairy Tales
Radio 3

Fairy and folk tales, being infinitely adaptable and interpretable, continue to furnish a basis for contemporary fables. Peter Redgrove has joined the delvers into decorative lore with a series of plays for radio, each derived from a well-known tale. Two of these plays, "The Three Feathers" and "The Juniper Tree", come virtually unaltered, though the boy in the latter whose stepmother has it in for him is described as "a bit of a weed", a colloquialism not available to the earliest translators of the Brothers Grimm. He is renamed Victor, perhaps to indicate his victory over death, and his kind-hearted sister is Anne-Marie rather than Marlinchen. But the props stay the same: the lethal apple chest, the juniper tree under which the boy's mother lies, the symbolic gold chain, slippers and millstone, each apporportioned to its proper recipient. "Victor will render into a delicious broth", says the unrepentant stepmother, opening the way for the lines reiterated by the dead-child-cum-bird: "My mother killed me. / My father ate me . . .".

The series (six plays in all) started with "Ashlepaddle", another name for Cinderella, played by Andren Kealy as a foy, somewhat wayward modern girl with a mother, once again, buried under a tree, and a stepmother who means to do her harm. The birds of the air are Ashlepaddle's allies, as in the old story, but the crucial slipper, with its sexual connotation, is replaced by a mask smelling of mould (stand-

ing for earthiness, perhaps). "The One Who Set Out to Study Fear" is the Redgrove adaptation that tampers most effectively with the original ingredients: for a start, the hero isn't a so-called simpleton but a clever lad who means to be a surgeon or a parapsychologist, even though he fails to understand that fear is the beginning of wisdom, as his elder, by no means fearless, brother puts it. Sonny is avid in his pursuit of a *frisson* but fails to attain one, whether in churchyard, dissecting room, haunted house or in bed with the princess. The pleasures of shuddering are eventually revealed to him, and he is rendered a bit less bumptious.

"The Master Thief" enables us to savour the activities of an expert in outwitting, as well as drawing one or two pungent analogies, as a Sleeping Beauty motif is grafted on to the traditional framework by Peter Redgrove. The last play in the series gains a similar extension. "The Flounder" concerns an amiable fisherman with an acquisitive wife. The wife's aggrandizement occurs by degrees. The poor couple gnaw a cottage, then a castle; the wife is crowned king, emperor, pope. It isn't enough. "I must be god – I will be god", she says. The goaded flounder reduces the couple to their first state – a hovel, barren complete with manger, and the wife pregnant. It is a deft twist.

A chanel piquancy informs the Redgrove plays, which – like the stories – are littered with bones, ashes, roots, things gnarled and rank and unutterably primeval. Our animal nature is everywhere emphasized: a beautiful woman, for example, is not to be distinguished from a toad. The strangeness and suggestiveness of the Grimm stories are retained and elaborated, while twentieth-century inclusions contribute an up-to-date complexity and chill.

Could you think of a way to regenerate Britain's inner cities for £15,000?

Entries are now invited for the first annual award to commemorate the late Charles Douglas-Home, former editor of The Times.

The subject is to be the revival of Britain's inner cities and entrants will be asked to submit a paper setting out a programme for original research on the problems of urban decay and regeneration.

As well as receiving a grant of up to £15,000 from the Charles Douglas-Home Memorial Trust, the winner will have his or her work published in The Times. Application forms can be obtained from Dr Barbara Day, 4 Offord Road, London N1 1DL and the closing date for entries is September 15, 1987.

THE TIMES

COMMENTARY

Experiment and irreverence in Edinburgh

Randall Stevenson on the highlights of Festival and Fringe

Last year, the drama brought to Edinburgh for Frank Dunlop's World Theatre Season allowed the Official Festival, unusually, to surpass the Fringe in variety and excellence. A staid air in some of this year's Festival events let the Fringe recover something of its ascendancy. The Gorky Theatre of Leningrad: Frank Dunlop's own Festival production of Schiller's *Mary Stuart*; even the Berliner Ensemble, seemed at times constrained by too placid a reverence for their material. It was a relief to find at least one of the Festival's visiting companies, the Gate Theatre of Dublin, actively and intelligently rather than passively faithful to Sean O'Casey. The particular vision of their production of *Junio and the Paycock* was immediately obvious from the set, an exceptionally sordid, crumbling tenement which emphatically established the household's abominable poverty as a central issue. The effects of this poverty were further demonstrated by Geraldine Plunkett's unsentimental performance as Junio. Her portrayal only hinted at the maternal strength usually stressed in the character, suggesting instead a desperate though resilient survivor, at peace only while the family believed in its sudden wealth, highlighted by an extravagant transformation of the set at the start of the second act. This restrained Junio allowed Captain Boyle to dominate the stage. A huge, bear-like, tenement Antony in Donal McCann's performance, he played across a range of audience reactions from resentment to amused tolerance of his impossible romance. Eventually, he was genuinely pathetic, collapsing on the bare boards of a house so palpably ruined by poverty and the politics which were carefully brought out in the figure of Johnny. Highlighting or reviewing accepted versions of characters in ways such as this, Gate Theatre's production not only revered O'Casey's vision but rediscovered some of the impoverished 1920s Dublin on which it was based. Intelligent and often very funny, *Junio and the Paycock* thoroughly deserved its sellout success.

The Cameri Theatre of Tel-Aviv merited (though it did not receive) equal attention for *Michael Kohlhaas*, especially for the imagination with which this Festival adaptation of Kleist's story was designed. Ruth Dur's sombre set was backed by a huge cyclorama: in one way, this was simply convenient for back-projection of slogans or representations of the rapidly changing locales through which Kohlhaas was moved by his obsessive quest for restitution of his wrongs. More spectacularly, black-clad actors on the forestage were often dwarfed by towering, projected clouds, or reduced to stark silhouettes against faint background illumination. This was especially effective when, after Kohlhaas's execution, the play concluded on a tableau of figures including Death with his scythe, imitatively aligned beneath a huge projected still of the dance of death from the end of Bergman's *The Seventh Seal*. Such presentations of dark, restricted stage space opening out upon wastes of death or tumultuous cloud were wholly appropriate to a story which begins in the domesticity of horse-theft and ends with a plague of violence destroying Europe. Cameri Theatre's production showed with terrible conviction Kohlhaas, another K figure, moved beyond Kafkaesque feelings of individual injustice towards versions of Armageddon and Holocaust - a disturbing parable for the late twentieth century, especially in the hands of an Israeli company examining a phase of German historical imagination.

History and how it can be imagined also appeared as central issues in *Mary Queen of Scots* *Got Her Head Chopped Off*, staged by Communicado at the Lyceum Studio. Liz Lochhead's play, however, exemplified the more experimental, irreverent demeanour of the Fringe, bearing in Frank Dunlop's Festival production of *Mary Stuart*, something of the relation of satire-play to tragedy. The action even began with a sort of sombre satire-figure, the Corbie, whose broad Scots humour aptly introduced an ironic vision

of Mary's story, setting predatory question marks against all the queen's romance and splendour. Like Ian Brown, in his excellent Lyceum script *Mary* in the 1970s, Lochhead initially seemed to accept that Mary's life is now so lost in Scottish romance and imagination as to be inaccessible to naturalistic reconstruction, and is best approached through dramatization of the diverse perspectives that have come to be attached to her story. This approach was often successfully developed, especially in a concluding scene showing Mary's execution transformed into a modern playground game. Elsewhere however, there were moments when modern distance and irony lapsed back awkwardly into conventional history or romantic paths. Equilibrium was not always ideally restored by Communicado's virtuosity in acrobatic dance, circus clowning, and fiddle playing, though their extravagant talent and dramatic trickery did add to the entertainment of the evening.

Like Communicado, the Shadow Syndicate has a solid Fringe reputation for theatrical inventiveness, and for creating live music to accompany their shows. Adrian Johnston added to this reputation this year, dashing from stage to synthesizer to deliver bizarre musical and phonetic effects for *The Last Days of the Nefertiti*. The production was equally distinguished by a visual imagination which made almost every moment a minor *coup de théâtre*. Gas-masked actors danced in the dark; smoke and radiance burst from opened boxes; dim electric light sent shadows weirdly swaying across the stage. Images of this sort were actually sustained in such unrelenting, feverish succession that the Shadow Syndicate seemed almost imaginatively over-productive. Their insistence on a pace too rapid to allow spectators to decide whether to laugh or be terrified did, however, add appropriately to the audience's disturbance. Narrative construction was equally challenging: different parts of the story were connected obliquely, often obscurely, further contributing to the close, uneasy attention compelled by hectic visual effects. Especially audacious in relocating the vampire story in Germany between the First World War and the rise of Hitler, the production's final coup was a horribly ironic mime of Nazi murder at the very moment when liberation from the vampire's deadly plague might most have been expected.

Jon Pope, the Shadow Syndicate's director, is a devoted admirer of the Wooster Group, the astonishing, if underrated, ambassadors of the American avant-garde in last year's Festival. This year, in *Magical Thinking*, a group of Wooster associates found a perhaps more appropriate outlet for their unique style on the Fringe. Hip liberalism in the 1960s was the approximate focus of the Group's dreams and deconstructions last year. In *Magical Thinking*, the stereotyping of women, culturally or in psychotherapy, provided a thematic centre for visual and other effects at least as bizarre as the Shadow Syndicate's, and very much more complex, if only because the Wooster Group performed simultaneously in a variety of media. Taped music, slides, home movies, strange lighting, even radio telephones, all contributed to a collage of surreal images. The apparently random, Burroughs-like, cross-cut texture of these images might have suggested casual, even improvised assemblage. Significant interconnections, subtle, often hilarious, simultaneities, nevertheless demonstrated the Wooster Group's meticulous dramatic construction and - presumably - intense rehearsal. As carefully controlled phonetically as it was visually, *Magical Thinking* used clipped, crazy American accents to cast an iron over the mechanics of communication, performance, and audience expectation. Parody is a natural development of this sort of irony. Last year, Arthur Miller was the target; this year, *Magical Thinking* half-exploited and half-mocked Beckett's *Play*, structurally a convenient vehicle for three women performers' nervy probing of psyche and society.

Ironically, the Wooster Group shared a venue (the Demarco Gallery, one of the most exciting on this year's Fringe) with the premiere production of Samuel Beckett's *Company*. Katharine Worth's adaptation of this

narrative piece made good use of the similarities of mood and theme which generally exist between Beckett's fiction and his drama. Her version retained the original's linguistic self-doubt, typical of Beckett's fiction. Staging it as a monologue fraught with reverberative memories, interrupted occasionally by a tape-recorded voice, nevertheless made *Company* scarcely distinguishable in style or subject from drama such as *Krapp's Last Tape*. Julian Curry's measured performance of the various voices, live or taped, that "come to one in the dark" suggestively developed the imaginings such voices bring. Exposing a mind inaccessible in its loneliness, yet following its movements with immediate emotional power, *Company* embodied the best characteristics of Beckett's dramatics.

A still more obsessive loneliness appeared in another powerful Fringe monologue, the work of one of the most promising of contemporary French playwrights, Enzo Cormann. The Traverse's production of *The Prowler (Le Radeur)* greatly benefited from the conviction of James Kelman's translation from Cormann's regional French into Glaswegian dialect. This provided a flexible, pungent idiom for the protagonist's confused, cruel confessional. The violence of his nature was further demonstrated by the hooded falcon which, strained on his wrist, communicating to audiences in the cramped theatre an unusually genuine sense of threat. Frequently turning its head, as if to listen to the actor, the bird also created an odd sense of unrealized, impossible conversation, strangely extending the possibilities of the monologue form as well as emphasizing the Prowler's alienation from human kind.

Another French play provided the highlight of the Traverse's excellent programme. Théâtre de la Basoche's *Le Lavoir (The Wash-House)* was the triumph of the Avignon Festival in 1986: its revival in Edinburgh may have been even more successful. The discovery of the disused Abbeymount wash-house as a stage space provided an environment historically appropriate to *Le Lavoir*, which is set on the eve of the First World War; it also added to the play's already highly-developed naturalism. This was further heightened by reliance on natural rather than stage light. The Edinburgh weather, at least during the first performance, seemed uncannily determined to eradicate all boundaries between actuality and artifice, mellow sunlight suddenly slanting through the wash-house windows to complement moments of fulfilment or resolution. Such distinct dramatic climaxes, however, were few in a play which largely eschewed conventional plot and dramatic action in favour of an apparently simple tracing of the ebb and flow of relationships among a group of working women engaged in the ordinary business of washing, ironing and chat. Extended attention to these banal details of everyday life developed character and emotion with great intimacy and conviction. The completeness with which *Le Lavoir* involved its audience in the women's community could be measured by the sensation created when the play's only outsider, and only male, appeared at the end. Bringing news of the outbreak of war, his entrance shockingly ruptured absorption in a domain previously set calmly apart from the inexplicable affairs of men. This conclusion communicated on a wholly imaginable human scale some of the hugeness of historical loss, suggesting the particular poignancy of the summer sunshine that faded so sharply from ordinary life in early August, 1914.

At the Avignon Festival, *Le Lavoir* won the Grand Prix. If such a prize had been on offer in Edinburgh, there would have been at least two other strong contenders. One was Russian, one was Yugoslav: both exploited theatrical possibility to the full, and even extended its limits. Moscow Studio Theatre of the South West's *Hamlet* was as brilliantly stylized as *Le Lavoir*; its staging was integrated into a specific vision of the play: lively but dark. Much of this vision was focused not upon Hamlet, many of whose soliloquies were cut, but on the theatre's founder and director, Valery R. Belyakovitch, in the part of Claudius.

Belyakovitch played him as an upstart but able politician; a confident, swaggering jive-act who kept the Elsinore court hopping to the production's thundering jazz-rock score - some of Hamlet's exclusion was signified by his delivering what soliloquies remained while leaning in weary stillness against huge speakers at the side of the stage. A sense of isolation was further emphasized by an expressionist lighting plot which provided separate, spotlight puddles of illumination for each character. This chequer-board of light and shade - over which figures were often forced to move quickly and in precise patterns - suggested fates firmly shaped even before the action began. Concentration on Claudius nevertheless made power and politics the central theme, rather than any metaphysical aspect of fate. Hamlet, in Victor V. Avilov's brilliantly diffident performance, was a figure doomed not by a tortuous inner nature but by his disdain for the power-play around him. This was in part a Brechtian *Hamlet*, challenging the audience to assess the mutual implications of personality and power. This challenge was at its clearest in concluding moments, when Claudius's corrupt but apparently stable court at last dissolved - its very pillars starting to sway and leak light eerily from their bases - only to be replaced by Fortinbras's far worse, stridently fascist régime. While the Danish court faded into the consuming darkness of the stage, the pillars, swung up to represent canon, blasted huge beams of light out at an audience by now in the grip of this *Hamlet* as completely as the production itself had shown its characters to be thralls of political circumstance.

Tattoo Theatre of Sarajevo began work on its audience even before it was in the auditorium, setting the opening scene of a turbulent relationship in the café of the Demarco gallery, also used later, during the interval, to present separate scenes for male and for female spectators. The set in the theatre itself represented a squalid flat where a couple love, squabble, and live violently but tenderly with their demanding little son. Tattoo Theatre's wordless action and exact movement in this domestic setting strongly resembled the inventive work of other recent visitors to the Fringe. Théâtre de Complicité (reviewed in TLS of September 12, 1985). Complicité, however, were fairly consistently comic and fantastic, whereas Tattoo Theatre, though often funny, were much more concerned with developing character and relationship in intimate realistic detail. Movements beyond realism, when they did occur, were all the more compellingly magical. They were mostly centred on a woman-sized rabbit, a familiar of the couple's love from its inception, who returned to console them or their child at moments of maximum domestic stress. Introducing in this way the logic, power and pleading of dreams into an unsentimental view of actuality, Tattoo Theatre's performance was as moving and beautifully structured as anything on this or recent Fringes. Audiences of their late-night show, returning still half-dreaming to rainy city streets at 2 am, might well have reflected that even in a year when cabaret and stand-up comedy seemed to predominate over drama, there was still plenty in the theatre to make fantastic the Festival, its Fringe and Edinburgh itself.

The seventh National Review of Live Art will take place at the Riverside Studios in London from October 8 to 11. The Festival will feature a selection of work by British performance artists, including platform work, installation of time-based pieces and video art. A full programme will be available in mid-September from Renee Lowes, Riverside Studios, Crisp Road, London W6 9RL.

LWT Plays on Stage has recently been launched by London Weekend Television, offering three prizes with a total value of £37,500 open to professional theatre companies in the United Kingdom. The closing date for submission of written proposals is September 30, 1987. The judges are Frank Finlay, Joan Plowright, Stephen Pollakoff, Carl Toms and Peter Wood. Further details are available from Marion Milne, LWT Public Relations (01-261 3196).

Passages to a better world

K. G. Davies

BERNARD BAILYN
Voyagers to the West
668pp. Tauris. £29.50.
1850430381
The Peopling of British North America: An introduction
177pp. Tauris. £12.95.
1850430373

What distinguished Britain's colonies in America from those of other European countries was the readiness of its people to go to them. It was so from the start: in Virginia's first fifteen years 9,000 landed on that inhospitable shore. Many died within months, nearly all within a few years, destroyed by disease, famine, or Indians. Hard as life in early Stuart England undoubtedly was, life in Virginia was worse. But still they came: a small minority survived and a minority within that minority prospered, giving faint colour to the belief, faith rather, that America was good "poor man's country". Things were seldom as bad in later years but even at the close of the colonial period an ill-conceived project could take a terrible toll of life. Yet neither the perils of the sea nor the hardships and humiliations of pioneering deterred the flow of emigrants from the British Isles. Such was America's hunger for people that Protestant French, Swiss and Germans were also welcomed. The open door to Europe's displaced persons was not invented in 1787 by the new republic; it was inherited.

The effects were far-reaching. Indeed, colonial America's history is to a large extent the history of its peopling. Without a sustained flow of free immigrants the colonies could not have achieved the solid demographic base which encouraged them to stand up to Britain and enabled the United States to achieve the kind of prosperity it enjoyed in the nineteenth century. Slavery, the obvious alternative, had penetrated the southern colonies; but even to this bounds could be set by an abundance of free or soon-to-be-free whites.

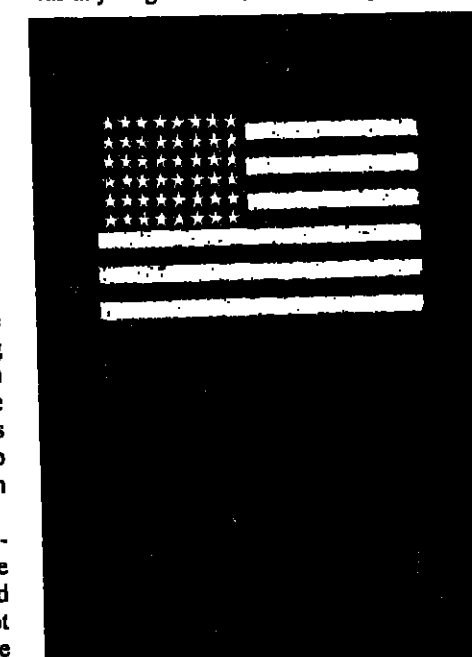
The original conception of America had been different: not a laboratory for social experiment, still less a land offering life without landlords, but an extension of Europe where existing social and economic patterns might with proper management be replicated: where royal favourites and nimble courtiers might secure fiefs and baronies and estates and enterprising country gentlemen find dowries for younger sons - a remoter but far greater Ireland. Any shortage of indigenous labour could be made up by importing surplus Europeans, not as freeholders but as tenants or labourers. So might the *ancien régime* be extended and refreshed. The idea was not entirely preposterous; monarchs were often glad to oblige when it cost them nothing, and a number of proprietorships came into being. The hope of fortunes in America for the fortunate in Britain survived the eclipse of personal monarchy. The Seven Years War opened huge new territories to settlement in the Florida, New York, Nova Scotia and elsewhere. A land-rush ensued. In the 1760s the Privy Council handed out nearly 14 million acres in East Florida alone to noblemen, prominent figures in government and civil service, and hangers-on.

Such lands were valueless without people. It was now more or less clear, as it had not been in 1607, that white servants could not be brigaded to work on large plantations; the best plan was to offer generous terms to free settlers and encourage them to carve out farms for themselves in the confidence that the land-the proprietor reserved for himself would in time increase in value. Those who departed from this formula generally came to grief. A rash of projects followed the peace of 1763, some doomed by the greed of the projector, some spoiled by incompetent entrepreneurs, some undermined by spiritless settlers, some simply unlucky; but there were other schemes, well conceived and prudently managed, which deserved to succeed and did.

Finding people in eighteenth-century Britain to go to America, either as indentured servants or to settle as farmers in the new territories, was not difficult. Poverty, present or feared, was the recruiting sergeant; ambition for a better life the spur. To chronic under-employment among rural craftsmen and in

urban industry was added the problem of improving landlords who, to pay for new houses or a life of fashion, rack-rented their lands and promoted enclosure. Casualties were inevitable, options few. The likeliest alternatives to emigration - crime and the army - could themselves be routes to the colonies: during the 1760s and 1770s nearly a thousand British felons, their death-sentences commuted to transportation, landed in America each year; and from 1763 the British army had fifteen battalions stationed there.

Such was the "epidemic phrenzy" for emigration that landlords took fright and started to complain in high places. Partly to deflect the complaints, partly to see if there was anything in them, the Treasury launched



Jasper Johns's "Flag on an Orange Field, II", reproduced from *Made in USA: An Americanization in modern art: the '50s & '60s* by Sidra Stich (280pp. California University Press. £53.50. 0520057562).

an inquiry into emigration from every port in England and Scotland. All emigrants were to be registered, and their name, age, sex, occupation, former residence, destination and - ambitious indeed - motive for emigration recorded. This compilation began in December 1773 and continued to March 1776, by which time emigration to the rebellious colonies had ceased. In little more than two years, 9,364 departures were recorded, 5,196 of English origin, 3,872 of Scottish. The overwhelming majority - 8,072 - went to those colonies which were on the point of declaring independence. Uneven and incomplete as they are, these records have survived to furnish useful data to historians and genealogists; some have been published. But they have not before been subjected to the thorough examination they receive from Bernard Bailyn in his *Voyagers to the West*, and they have certainly never been brought into such a fruitful relationship with other historical evidence.

It is, initially, a surprise to come upon Bailyn working a computer, to find thirty-nine statistical tables in his book and 200 pages devoted to a discussion of his figures. America's foremost historian of the colonies, his marks have been made in social history and its connections with politics, in the history of ideas in revolutionary America, and in his magnificent biography of Thomas Hutchinson. From time to time he has let slip something less than enthusiasm for the economists and statisticians who have applied themselves to the colonial period. *Voyagers to the West* is not, however, the work of an apostate. Bailyn's preference for literary evidence is unimpaired and firmly stated:

"The questions arise from the computer printouts like a cloud of gnats, and one wishes one were alone, with a few literary documents that might be analyzed exhaustively, if impressionistically, down to the last syllable."

So might a handloom weaver grieve over the automatic machine at which he now sits.

But Bailyn's statistics are not really as complicated as this lament may suggest. In the first place, while most eighteenth-century statistical material was created for quite other purposes than those of historians and needs a certain amount of massage to produce the results desired, the Treasury survey was undertaken to

answer roughly the same questions Bailyn wants to put: who emigrated, how many of them, whither, whence, why? Second, with fewer than 10,000 names for a little over two years, no sampling is needed, thus eliminating one major agent of complication and a common reason why historical statisticians are apt to take one another by the throat. Bailyn's emigrants are by no means all anonymous figures but in a number of cases identifiable people with wives and children and problems. At the expense of much labour he has contrived to get close to individuals, their homes, the conditions that made them emigrate, and the fate that awaited them in America. The result is less like a Lowry townscape, more like a large Victorian painting with a key to identify the people pictured. Third, Bailyn uses simple arithmetic only: there is no advanced mathematics to terrorize the innumerate. This also saves him from the dangers inherent in applying any sophisticated technique to crude raw material, not least that of clothing the product in an authenticity it does not deserve.

Bailyn's methodology is traditional. His reservations about historic statistics, as I understand them, apply not to their use but to the failure, where it has occurred, of statisticians to relate their findings to other and non-statistical sources, and perhaps to a certain sectarianism that is apt to mar the work of any who believe they hold a brand-new key for unlocking long-closed doors. Bailyn's point - and the merit of the book is to display it - is that the doors have been opened by scores of historians, geographers and genealogists over the past century and that statistical data yield most when brought into the closest possible relationship with the findings established by our predecessors. Bailyn's message is that

The worst blunders in the world are made by attempting to quantify the unquantifiable and by joining high theory with dubious statistics in order to explain, in a rigorous-seeming fashion, developments that are in their nature vague and full of the confusion of human affairs.

Historical statistics should be "windows, insights, into the past, when used in some sensible conjunction with non-quantitative historical sources", points of departure, not the final product.

In an extended examination of the Treasury returns Bailyn identifies two streams of emigration from Britain in the 1770s. The first was the result of long-established recruitment of indentured servants, studied forty years ago by Abbot E. Smith and more recently by David Galenson. These emigrants were chiefly young, unattached males from the Home

Counties and the Thames Valley, semi-skilled, of some enterprise, probably down on their luck, not the dregs of society. Most were shipped out of London under indentures to the captain who, on arrival in the colonies, sold the contract for service - generally for four years - to the highest bidder. Many America-bound vessels carried a few such; it was a trade in itself, lightly supervised and prone to abuse but slick and efficient.

More interesting because less well known is Bailyn's second stream: families, sometimes groups from a locality, responding both to difficult economic conditions and to propaganda on behalf of the land of opportunity. Bailyn examines both in detail, leading us deep into the countryside of North Yorkshire and Western Scotland whence the biggest responses were coming in 1774-5. We accompany the emigrants to the Customs officer to whom they declare their motives to be "to get bread", to escape "high rents and oppression" or more specifically "on account of their rents being raised by Wm. Weddell, Esq". More, Bailyn thinks, emigrated for positive than negative reasons. Like the country people in the Industrial Revolution drawn into towns by higher wages, the majority of Bailyn's emigrants "were lured, not driven overseas, by their own ambitions, plans and expectations".

Clear of Customs, Bailyn conducts his parties across the ocean and plants them in the soil of Nova Scotia ("Nova" to its friends) and the other developing territories. Great erudition adorns these "microhistorical" studies of how the uprooted behaved before there were cities to lose themselves in. Some failed; but the evidence is biased towards the successful, who within twenty years were living comfortably and displaying an upward mobility and an independence they could not have dreamed of at home. As Dr Johnson foresaw would be the fate of the Highlanders, there was culture shock and cultural diminution both in Britain and in America; traditional cultures cannot withstand transplant and dispersal. This emigration is on the whole a success story; but the successes are individual not collective.

In the preface to *Voyagers* Bailyn calls the book "this first volume"; *The Peopling of British North America*, simultaneously published, is presented as an introduction to the putative future series. Elegant as always, its short essays define the subject in a general way, but it would be regrettable if their brevity persuaded anyone not to read the big book. Plenty of historians can write well on general matters; far fewer have Bailyn's talent for presenting detail in an engaging and readable form.

Exilic evidence

Oliver Marshall

EUGENE C. HARTER
The Lost Colony of the Confederacy
141pp. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi. £12.90.
0878052593

In the face of humiliation, military defeat and economic devastation, thousands of former Confederates resolved to "reconstruct" themselves in often distant parts of the world, forming a wave of emigration without precedent in the history of the United States. Most headed West, some fled to Canada, Europe and even Egypt, while, assisted by emigration societies which mushroomed throughout the Southern states, a number of the voluntary exiles moved south to Mexico, British Honduras, Cuba, Venezuela and Brazil. Offering cheap land, a climate suited to familiar crops, political and economic stability, religious freedom and the possibility of continued slave ownership, Brazil rapidly established itself as the main Latin American destination.

Eugene Harter, himself a *Confederado* (a Brazilian of Confederate origin - he claims there are 100,000 of them), seeks to expose a conspiracy of silence surrounding the Confederate exodus to Brazil. Previous estimates of the number of Confederate emigrants to that country have ranged between 2,000 and 8,000, figures which in Harter's opinion are absurdly low. With emigration viewed as un-

patriotic and un-American, the reporting of departures and subsequent news of the exiles was, according to Harter, frequently and deliberately suppressed by the American press. However, on the basis of "a study of available figures, newspaper reports, and personal data gathered from descendants", Harter claims that the true number of emigrants to Brazil (including a number of devoted former slaves) was well over 20,000, of whom only a few gave up and returned home. Since Harter gives very few clues as to his sources, it is difficult not to be as sceptical of his figures as he is of previous smaller estimates. In view of his belittling of North American evidence, it is curious that, apart from a series of often entertaining anecdotes passed down in his family and the families of friends, no Brazilian sources appear to have been investigated.

Falling to disentangle myth from reality, the trivial from the significant, Harter credits *Confederados* with, for example, inspiring the designs on Amazon Indian pottery, introducing Brazil to modern dental practices and the state of São Paulo to the plough, giving the world Rita Lee - Brazil's 1964 "Singer of the Year" - and injecting traces of a "Protestant work ethic" into the soon-to-industrialize but hitherto traditionally Catholic São Paulo. Harter's apparent need to show that the *Confederados* have been an important, even crucial, force in the development of modern Brazil serves only to turn what might have been a fascinating case-study of exile and gradual acculturation into a collection of exaggerated and inherently improbable assertions.

Shuttle to disaster

Desmond King-Hele

MALCOLM MCCONNELL

Challenger: "A major malfunction"
269p. Simon and Schuster. £12.95.
0671 65439 X

The disaster that engulfed the space shuttle Challenger on January 28, 1986, was a traumatic blow to the technological self-confidence of the United States, and there was little comfort from the subsequent inquiry that blamed flaws in management at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).

Malcolm McConnell's book traces the tragedy from its confused beginnings to an end that now seems inevitable. The triumphant Moon landings in 1969 had led to the proposal of a new "national goal" — a manned landing on Mars in the 1990s. This would be accomplished by placing in orbit round the Earth a large manned space station, where the Mars vehicle would be assembled; and there would be a space shuttle to ferry crews and supplies to and from the space station. But this NASA plan was so costly that it was gradually eroded, and all that remained was the idea of a re-usable space shuttle that would, as it were, climb up to the top of the hill to a non-existent space

station, and then climb down again. As McConnell points out, the shuttle was "without an assignment, an orphan technology even before it was born". None the less it was a great technological challenge, and the first NASA designs envisaged two liquid-fuel rockets, a booster and a winged orbiter, both burning hydrogen with oxygen and both re-usable many times. But again the cost alarmed Congress, and a cheaper shuttle emerged, with solid-fuel boosters recoverable by parachute. The Apollo moon-rocket, powered by liquid propellants, was provided with a small escape rocket for the crew. As the shuttle was above all to be safe and reliable, no such escape mechanism was included, even though solid-fuel rockets had previously been regarded as less safe than liquid-fuel. This double-think on safety was the first of many.

So the project went ahead, constrained by financial cutbacks and plagued by delays, particularly with the liquid-fuel main engine, which was of advanced design, and with the thousands of ceramic tiles — a new method of protecting against aerodynamic heating during the descent. The first launches, in 1982, were successful but there seemed little hope of achieving the twenty-four launches a year needed for an economically viable "Space Transportation System": in 1984 NASA gave

the cost as \$200 million per launch.

To keep Congressional support, NASA had to try to accelerate to the promised launch rate. This pressure led to long hours and exhaustion for many staff, with safety rules sometimes being "waived", as McConnell shows in horrifying detail. "Increasingly dangerous risks" were being taken, he says, as the flight rate quickened in 1985. Weather constraints were particularly irksome if the countdown was perfect: launching through rain could damage the tiles, but who could predict for sure when a cloud would turn into a rain-cloud?

On January 6, 1986, the shuttle Columbia was about to be launched when it was discovered by luck (because a temperature alarm was triggered) that nine tons of liquid oxygen had been drained off by mistake. There were six delays, including this near-disaster, before Columbia was launched, on January 12. But NASA wanted it back as soon as possible, to cannibalize it for the benefit of Challenger, which was already on the launch-pad and in urgent need of spare parts. Columbia's return was delayed by bad weather, and even then it had to be diverted to California.

The pressure to launch Challenger on time was intense. The delays to Columbia had been embarrassing and must not recur, because this was a highly publicized launch, with the

teacher Christa McAuliffe on board: this was to be the launch that would prove space travel was "routine". The original date, January 23, had to be abandoned because the spare parts taken from Columbia could not be fitted in time, and launch was set for January 26, only to be postponed to January 27 because of an unfavourable (and incorrect) weather forecast. On January 27 the launch was "scrubbed" after the crew had been aboard for four hours. The final desperate attempt was made on the bitterly cold morning of January 28. Much of the huge launch tower was draped in ice, which might shake off and strike the shuttle. But the mood was "press on", and doubters had to "prove that it was not safe". It was the failure of one of the solid-fuel boosters to withstand the cold that brought about the disaster.

This sorry tale is well told by McConnell. He has unearthed all the essential evidence and has set it down fairly. The pressure on NASA forced their managers to declare "waivers" on safety and to overrule advice from expert engineers. They had broken rules before; why not again? There are parallels with the later accidents at Chernobyl and Zeebrugge: in all three the technology seemed adequate but was not foolproof; and it was human folly, mismanagement and rule-bending that created all three disasters.

The Colonel and the Professor

continued from page 950

"openness" or tolerance. What has happened he argues, is that the elite universities have been transformed from places in which a few lucky students submitted themselves to teachers, who perform the sacerdotal function of initiating these neophytes into what Bloom genuinely believes are the immutable verities (as opposed to the noble accomplishments) of Western civilization, into places in which no discipline or point of view has priority over any other. The result, according to Bloom, has been a betrayal of the universities' essential, Platonic function (Bloom seems to think that training in science or the professions is not something people really need colleges for, insisting that the only essential function of the university is to civilize the young). Not only has real thought been debased, and the American spirit impoverished, but the triumph of what Bloom takes to be a supine cultural relativism has brought forth what is by now several generations of boorish ignoramus, interested only in cultivating their sexual appetites, their taste for rock music, their nihilistic "niceness", and their pampered guilt over what their ancestors did to the coloured peoples of the world. Instead of their being "a community that is exemplary for all other communities", Bloom argues that the universities have betrayed their mission, betrayed — shades of Colonel North and Congressman Hyde — the West by giving in to the spirit of rebellion and anarchy.

Colonel North is handsome and speaks with the appealing simplicity of a John Wayne movie. In contrast, Bloom's book has nothing of the Marine's ironic self-assurance; it is the cry of a crank, but also the cry of a man genuinely in pain. None the less, allowing for the vast numerical difference between book buyers and television viewers (much of North's appeal, after all, came from his indisputable telegraphic qualities), the success of *The Closing of the American Mind* has been phenomenal. In a period when the best seller list is not only invariably dominated, but also almost exclusively populated, by self-help books, accounts of out-of-body travel and celebrities' memoirs (sometimes, as in the case of Shirley MacLaine's recent memoirs, the three genres are combined), *The Closing of the American Mind* still was able to climb quickly to the top, much to the surprise of its publishers, Simon and Schuster, whose first printing was an extremely modest 5,000 copies. There the book has remained, squatting like an idle penguin, for the last four months. Publishers are baffled; book sellers are baffled; even Professor Bloom in his many recent interviews has seemed somewhat at a loss to account for this extraordinary response.

To be sure, Bloom is not the first American author to strike it rich by insisting in print that the country is going to hell. Americans have

long had a peculiar fondness for having their deficiencies pointed out to them, as enterprising Europeans have understood since the days of Mrs Trollope and Dickens; and though Bloom, if he could stand outside the magic circle of his own success, would probably discern in all this hoopla another example of the nation's abiding insecurity, or its masochism, the taste probably has nothing more metaphysically significant about it than the American craving for a bit of rhetorical spice — even when it comes at one's own expense. If North seems somehow far more comfortable with the rules of engagement he supposes obtain over there in the Evil Empire, Bloom, for his part, is eerily reminiscent of all those dyspeptic Europeans forced to earn their livelihoods in an America they couldn't abide. In a sense, just as North uses the word democracy as a kind of brand-name (as in "the Nicaraguan democratic resistance", the *Contras*), so Bloom cherishes America, but exclusively as an abstract construct (as in his glowing references to "the American moment in world history").

The odd thing is that Bloom doesn't seem actually to like America. Indeed, when it comes time for him to describe anything about the place, he speaks only in what might be called that new grammatical mood invented by neo-conservatives: the denunciative. Bloom hates American mores, decries American families, despises American teenagers, and takes no notice of the beauty of the American landscape. This is, to say the least, a peculiar stance for a man who claims to love America (indeed, the paradox has led the political writer Sidney Blumenthal to quip, not entirely ironically, that Bloom seems *anti-American* whether he knows it or not). In fact it is the hallmark of the neo-conservative Right. The real glories of American culture, which, whether Bloom likes it or not, are Hollywood movies and pop music, come in for the professor's special scorn. Rock music is Bloom's particular *déjà vu*, because, as he puts it, "civilization or, to say the same thing, education is the taming or domestication of the soul's raw passions". Bloom's extraordinary assumption (the cornerstone of his book, really) that civilization and education are the same thing, indeed his total identification of civilization with repression, leads to a position which excludes not only compassion, but simple humanity. Writing of what he believes is a prototypical middle-class adolescent, Bloom conjures up a beast. The passage is worth quoting at length:

Picture a thirteen-year-old boy sitting in the living room of his family home doing his math assignment while wearing his Walkman headphones or watching MTV. He enjoys the liberties hard won over centuries by the alliance of philosophic genius and political heroism, consecrated by the blood of martyrs; he is provided with comfort and leisure by the most productive economy ever known to mankind; science

has penetrated the secrets of nature in order to provide him with the marvellous lifelike electronic sound and image reproduction he is enjoying. And in what does progress culminate? A pubescent child whose body throbs with organic rhythms; whose feelings are made articulate in hymns to the joys of onanism or the killing of parents; whose ambition is to win fame and wealth in imitating the drag-queen who makes the music.

(The drag queen in question is Mick Jagger, an identification that will probably surprise most heterosexual women between eight and eighty.)

"Nobody except small children", Paul Goodman once wrote, "has a claim to be loved, but there is a way of rejecting someone that accords his right to exist and be himself." Goodman is all but forgotten now, and yet his book on education, *New Reformation*, written towards the end of his life, is a terrific antidote to the hate-filled, self-regarding spleen of *The Closing of the American Mind*. Goodman was as devoted to "high culture" as Bloom claims to be, but the difference was that Goodman never made the mistake of thinking that an educational programme was more important than living people. Where Bloom elevates education, and, worse, erudition, above humanity ("Man may live more truly and fully in reading Plato and Shakespeare than at any other time", he writes toward the end of his book), Goodman understood that there are many kinds of intelligence and many ways of leading a decent life. A genuine conservative (rather than an autocrat), Goodman put the matter well when he wrote that "for green grass and clean rivers, children with bright eyes and good color what-over the color, people safe from being pushed around so they can be themselves — for a few things like these, I find I am pretty ready to think away all other political, economic, and technological advantages".

Bloom, embellishing his map with monsters, would no doubt describe this view as a perfect example of the cultural relativism he so decries. In fact, however, this level-headed, realistic humanity is the essential quality that is as absent from *The Closing of the American Mind* as it is from Colonel North's plans for Nicaragua's future. The thirteen-year-old whom Bloom portrays as subliminal could be any kid who likes to dance; indeed, the most telling aspect of Bloom's own description is its utter abstraction. He has found a type, and has no interest whatever in describing a person; a single, contradictory individual. The strange part is that the apprehension of this kind of truth is something most people everywhere know instinctively and have always known. They didn't learn it from Leo Strauss, or from Professor Bloom, but incidentally, in the course of their one and only lives, the way almost everything of value is best taught and most fully apprehended. It takes a professor of philosophy from the University of Chicago to

have forgotten this.

Of course, all of Bloom's work, like that of his mentor Strauss, has been, despite its other merits, a self-described blueprint for excluding people, an exercise in the choosing of an elect. It is fascinating that the books Bloom continually returns to are *The Republic*, and Rousseau's *Émile*, which are themselves brilliant master plans for separating out the philosophers from what Bloom, with characteristic disdain, refers to as "the self-contradictory simulacra of community". The teacher, he wrote in his commentary on *The Republic*, "knows which [students] should be led further and which ones should be kept away from the mysteries". The fact is that Bloom has contempt for the senses, contempt for the profound wisdom of daily experience; contempt for anyone, particularly among his students, who fails to bow before his quasi-sacerdotal authority of teacher. However awful life is, it is better and richer than Bloom seems able to imagine. But then, it is awfully difficult to entertain seriously the arguments about what the good life consists of from a man who can write: "When I was fifteen years old, I saw the University of Chicago for the first time and somehow I sensed I had discovered my life." Nowhere in his often autobiographical book does Bloom mention a lover, a child, a sibling, a friend (as opposed to a disciple or a colleague), or a parent who can measure to his university, or even to the so-called "Great Books program" at the University of Chicago where he received his undergraduate education.

But this should really come as no surprise. It is an age of pious bullies in America, and far too many people are having far too good a time beating up on the young, the poor, the defeated. Colonel North represents the traditional Right's inept attempt to revenge itself for the US defeat in Vietnam, while books like *The Closing of the American Mind* represent an attempt by academics still feverishly angry at the students of the 1960s (the decisive moment for Bloom seems to have been the Black Power movement at Cornell in 1969) to express their detestation. The empire strikes back, indeed. In reality, Colonel North lives in a cartoon world of his own devising in which he can describe a country like the Sultanate of Brunei as part of "the democracies" and a real democracy like Costa Rica as a stumbling block to American policy in Central America; and in which he can talk of wanting to go "one on one with Abu Nidal". (Bet the farm on Abu Nidal.) In the meantime, Nicaraguans on both sides die, in a stupid war that the US government chooses to fight by that most cowardly of means, proxy, while, back home, men like Professor Bloom, their paychecks assured by right-wing foundations that have also been so active in supporting the *Contras*, publish books decent people would be ashamed of having

Meetings in Buenos Aires

Jason Wilson

JOHN KING

"Sur": A study of the Argentine literary journal and its role in the development of a culture 1931-1970
232pp. Cambridge University Press. £27.50.
0521 26849 4

CHRISTOPHER TOWNE LELAND

The Last Happy Men: The generation of 1922, fiction, and the Argentine reality
198pp. Syracuse University Press. \$29.95.
08156 2376 3

Both John King and Christopher Towne Leland read twentieth-century Argentine literature in terms of the dynamics of Argentine history, rejecting a purely literary approach. They lead us to the texts via their unconscious ideological contexts, and their interpretations act as a kind of cultural psychoanalysis, revitalizing both the texts and the authors they focus on.

King examines Latin America's finest and most influential literary magazine, *Sur*; a fascinating picture emerges. *Sur* was founded in 1931 by Victoria Ocampo, a rich, well-born woman who embodied many of the paradoxes of Argentine history. Like many of her class she was brought up speaking French and admiring European culture. When she decided to become a writer she had to relearn Spanish. King shows that despite her origins, she was quite a rebel. In the 1930s, the *década infame* of military coups, and then under Peronism, she decided to maintain cultural standards by inviting foreign intellectuals to Buenos Aires, and translated them in her magazine. They ranged from Tagore to Roger Caillois and Camus; some, like Drieu la Rochelle, became her lovers. *Sur*, modelled on the *Nouvelle Revue Française* and Ortega y Gasset's *Revista de Occidente*, became the meeting-point for a group of writers who shared basic attitudes and prejudices about culture, the greatest writer among them being Jorge Luis Borges. King restores to Borges's deliberately subversive, abstract fictions the invisible dimension of history that generated them, from the rise of fascism in Argentina in the 1930s, to support for the Allies in the Second World War, the Cold War and opposition to Perón. Through the *Sur* group — Ocampo, Bloy Casares, Borges, and some members from abroad, like Octavio Paz — we see refracted many of the formative socio-political events of the mid-century.

Sur's great influence stems from Borges, not only because of the unspanish rigour of his style, but also because of the translations he did. Ocampo and her editors, José Bianco and Enrique Pezzoni, translated what they considered the best writing from abroad, from Virginia Woolf (with whom Ocampo identified strongly), Aldous Huxley, Glend and Faulkner

to Malraux, Camus and Sartre; this gave younger writers throughout the continent, from Vargas Llosa and Carlos Fuentes to García Márquez and Cabrera Infante, access to writers who enabled them to break away from nationalism and cultural provincialism and start out on their own paths. King shows that *Sur* was never an eclectic periodical, but also that it refused to define the values it defended. It was anti-Marxist and anti-fascist but lost its way when it turned its back on Castro's Cuba.

King writes well, with apt quotations (unfortunately not translated into English); he provides gossip, and scandals, as well as an informative manual on intellectual conflicts in Argentina. His setting of Ocampo, Borges and their circle in an ideological context leads to some refreshing revaluations. He has underplayed the sexual relationships — *Sur* as a home for homosexuals in macho Argentina — nor does he refer to the Argentine surrealists' liter-

Argentina by reading back into the work of fiction writers like Roberto Mariani, Roberto Arlt and Ricardo Güiraldes symptoms, even premonitions, of the bankruptcy of the Liberal dream and the 1930 military coup. He takes these three novelists who published novels in the mid-1920s, and subtly makes them voice the many undigested experiences of Argentine history, from the immigration that was crowding Buenos Aires, to the new rootlessness, loneliness and alienation. Leland analyses the homoerotic conflicts in each of the novels he has chosen and relates them to the male-dominated culture of the immigrants and the consequent sublimation of friendship in a world of devious women, urban violence and penniless newcomers who have nowhere to go.

Mariani is rescued from oblivion as a sensitive recorder of what office life must have been like in the lower echelons in hectic, polyglot Buenos Aires, while the chapter on Güiraldes



An illustration of a Nicaraguan peasant learning to read, taken from *The Tiger's Milk: Women of Nicaragua* by Adriana Angel and Fiona Macintosh (142pp. Virago. Paperback. £8.95. 0 80668 893 3).

ary opposition to *Sur*, while in a footnote he confesses that when he tried to investigate the magazine's finances, he was made to feel "un-couth". At the same time he resists rubbishing Ocampo's elitist pretensions to universal culture, simply resetting them in her difficult times and making her more of an oppositional figure (in a literary and feminist sense) than she appears today.

Christopher Leland, as his title suggests, seeks to undermine the complacency of 1920s

restores topicality to a novelist acclaimed by many for his nostalgia. If one had a quibble with Leland it might be that the specifically literary is too quickly absorbed into his psycho-cultural analyses, so that when, for example, Arlt's hero in *El juguete rabioso* feels good spitting at a beggar, he misses the Baudelairean echo. But Leland does succeed in plunging us back into history, and defends the novel as an apt register of the half-conscious truths of the times.

Narrative continuities

Gordon Brotherston

JAMES HIGGINS

A History of Peruvian Literature
379pp. Liverpool: Cairns. £30.
0 905205 35 9

To define and write about "national" literature is a more than usually awkward task in the case of Spanish America's many republics, for their current boundaries often cut right through larger and longer-standing polities from the Spanish colonial period. And before the Spanish came yet other territorial patterns existed with what was, and to some extent still is, native America. The Mayas of New Spain, for example, now live divided between Mexico and four Central American States. To the south, in the Andes, the Quechua and Aymara of the Inca empire which then became the viceroyalty of Peru today find themselves distributed between Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and northern Argentina.

These facts of cultural geography mean that difficulties in defining this or that national literature in Latin America are not just procedural

but involve basic questions like where to start, and how or whether to trace the continuity of non-Spanish literatures that survive within today's State boundaries. In the case of Quechua, the continuity extends from before Pizarro to the rhetoric of modern resistance movements like the Sendero Luminoso. Moreover, Inca literature as such, its plays, hymns and histories, is intricately bound up with a recording device, the knotted strings of the quipu, whose sophistication has long defied Western presuppositions about what writing is and is not.

In *A History of Peruvian Literature*, James Higgins has paid close attention to all these problems and goes to some length to define the coverage he offers at each stage. His initial overview of Inca and Quechua writings might raise a question here and there, but as a gesture towards the native tradition it is both apt and welcome; and he offers sympathetic and informed readings of particular works, notably the thousand-page illustrated letter sent by Guaman Poma to Philip III of Spain, the famous *Nueva coronación a buen gobierno*. His account of literary production in the viceroyalty, the best so far available in English, is enhanced by a discussion of two recently-ex-

humed texts: Juan de Mogrovejo de la Cerda's *La endiablada* (?1626), the first prose fiction of Spanish-speaking Peru; and the short novels of Pablo de Olavide (1725-1803). And this feeds neatly into the current debate about the tacit links between early narrative in Spanish America and its much-celebrated modern novel.

After these strong beginnings, Higgins turns to the literature of the Peru that became an independent republic in the early nineteenth century. There are many good things here, the treatment of Cesar Vallejo's prose works, for instance, and their place in the socialist realism of the 1920s and 30s; and the engagement with such modern poets as Antonio Cisneros, whose work has moved from ironic disquisitions on the false consciousness of bourgeois Lima towards meditations on rural communities threatened by capitalism. Yet by this stage Higgins's history amounts formally to little more than a chronological listing, a catalogue of authors in which the bridging passages become more and more predictable. However, as a reference work which begins by asking the basic question "What is Peruvian literature?", this new history makes a necessary and trustworthy guide.

Early mastery

Yoram Bronowski

JORGE LUIS BORGES

Textos Cautivos: Ensayos y reseñas en "El Hogar" (1936-1939)
Edited by Enrique Saccerio-Gari and Emir Rodríguez Monegal
338pp. Buenos Aires: Tusquets.

Between 1936 and 1939 the Buenos Aires magazine *El Hogar* ran a weekly column by Jorge Luis Borges. *El Hogar* (The Hearth) was an illustrated weekly intended for, and presumably read mainly by, adolescent girls and housewives, and containing reports of social events and photographs of cinema and football stars. But under the general heading of "Libros y Autores Extranjeros", it contained also Borges's reviews of (principally) English, French and German books, interspersed with essays about such figures as Franz Kafka, T. S. Eliot and Evelyn Waugh. What the readers made of these fireworks of erudition and wit can be only guessed at; but at the end of three years the publishers did not renew their contract with Borges. Only once again, in 1941, a year and a half after his final column, did another article by Borges appear in *El Hogar*: an essay called "Definición de germanofilia", which was directed, with deadly sarcasm, to Argentinian pro-Nazis, the "germanophiles" of the title.

In his later years of fame Borges seemed not to think too highly, rather obviously, of his *El Hogar* contributions. In his "Autobiographical Notes" of 1970 he refers to them as "a small-paying job". However, the late doyen of Borges studies, Emir Rodríguez Monegal, re-read them in their entirety and was struck by their brilliance and style, calling these occasional pieces "the best possible introduction to his mind and work". Rodríguez Monegal has culled the present republication, together with his student Enrique Saccerio-Gari, who has supplied a general introduction, describing in detail the complicated history of Borges's *El Hogar* connection as well as pointing out the literary merits of these notes and reviews. He also gives us a short memoir of Rodríguez Monegal, who was a very Borgesian figure in his own right.

The title of "Captive Texts" alludes to their having first appeared in a totally incongruous context, in captivity as it were. But reading them one cannot doubt for a moment that they are pure Borges, that he made no concessions to the presumed readers of *El Hogar*, but was as playfully erudite and totally independent in his judgments here as in his later essays and stories. Of course, the Borges of 1936 or even 1939 was not yet the brilliant author discovered by the wider world of letters during the 1960s. He was no longer young (b 1899), but still a local man of letters, if not a hack, whose fame was restricted to his native Buenos Aires. The prevailing opinion that his early work was only a prolonged preparation for the later stories may be erroneous, however. Borges was never really an apprentice: his beginnings show the same writer at work as his later works. In the *El Hogar* articles he uses the same syntactic devices, above all the same deceptive simplicity, which characterize his mature style. These short texts are unmistakably Borgesian, not least in those characteristic adjectives which one meets with here with delighted surprise. Who but Borges, for example, the philosemite reviewing an antisemitic book published in Germany (1937), could have written with mordant irony of the "inexhaustible duties and delights of antisemitism"?

He reviewed a large number of books during these three years at *El Hogar*. There are here the famous names one associates with Borges today, like Chesterton, Kipling and Schopenhauer, but he writes also about Joyce, Bellow and Virginia Woolf. Others appear as the subject of an occasional "biografía sintética", often with translation added, as for instance of a fragment of *The Rock* in a piece on T. S. Eliot. One is surprised to discover an interest in Russian literature, exemplified in essays not only about Dostoevsky but also about Isaac Babel, at a time when Babel's name was virtually unknown in the West. And there are other surprises in this delightful collection of a master's *prosas*.

Picturing the ancient world

Nicholas Purcell

ANNA MARGUERITE McCANN, et al
The Roman Port and Fishery of Cosa: A center of ancient trade
 353pp. Guildford: Princeton University Press, £100.10.
 0691035814
 PETER GARNSEY and RICHARD SALLER
The Roman Empire: Economy, society and culture
 231pp. Duckworth, £24.
 0715621459

On the cover of Anna Marguerite McCann's lavish archaeological publication of the remains of the Roman harbour-settlement of Cosa in Tuscany we see a splendid reconstruction of the scene there in the middle of the first century BC. A rustic temple rises above a marsh in which fishermen row from neat jetties. A set of elaborate fish-tanks and traps opens on to a small port in the shelter of a rubble breakwater. A watch for tunny-fish shoals is being kept from a wooden tower on the point above; smoke rises from the little lighthouse at the end of the jetty. On the beach are various practical sheds and workshops – we identify kilns, vats and an aqueduct. In a large open court, booths and stalls house a vigorous commercial life, and amphorae are being loaded off the beach into one of the half-dozen merchantmen in the harbour. A picture like this can be one of the best forms of presentation of the ancient world: it makes a whole range of complex statements about the society and economy of Cosa, and conveys them in instantly understandable terms. It is rather a pity, then, that the other work reviewed here avoids all such visual aids, barring one general map of the Empire.

Peter Garnsey and Richard Saller aim at scholars in other disciplines, and their modest, judicious, lucid exposition of most of the questions which currently occupy historians of the Roman Empire deserves to be widely read by social and economic historians of other pre-industrial societies in search of comparative material. They will find well-supported, methodologically sensitive accounts, a wide range of bibliography in all languages, and a refreshing avoidance of polemic and extremism. But in its avoidance of *parti pris*, it does to

an extent – to revert to the visual – adopt a kind of monochrome fair-mindedness in putting the Roman Empire alongside other states, which is inclined to submerge the colourfully distinctive. It is natural to compare *The Roman Empire: Economy, society and culture* with Michael Rostovtzeff's *Social and Economic History of the Roman World*; on scarcely any point would one now prefer it to the remarks of Garnsey and Saller, but in its pioneering and imaginative use of visual material and illustrative example it gives a far more vivid instant characterization of a strange world.

There is no doubt that the admirable comparative perspective of Garnsey and Saller is safer. In fact, many of the things in McCann's Cosa panorama are deduced not from excavation, but from the literary sources, from comparative evidence and from debatable theories about the history of the time. The excavations discovered a remarkable geared waterlifting apparatus, which will become a prominent datum in the history of ancient technology; good survey clarified the fishing arrangements and explained the relationship of lagoon, port and the curious chasms cut in the rock which have long been controversial; an excellent programme of underwater work has made the history of the port much clearer. But beyond that, the cover drawing rests for the most part on clever interpretation, and the incautious must avoid thinking that the team actually found kilns, an emporium, a vineyard, a fish-saltory or a lighthouse. The clarity and straightforwardness of Garnsey and Saller spare the reader from being on the alert like this; large sections of the book (especially the chapters on the land and on the social hierarchy) will rapidly become standard discussions.

They make no claims of completeness; this considered, it is remarkable how much there is. The main subdivisions are the economy, society and two slightly uneasy mates in the concluding section, culture and religion. But the Mediterranean base of the Empire and the essentially passive nature of its governmental structures are suitably set out as an introduction. Perhaps there is too little crossing of the boundaries on which they have fixed; but this matters less in a book primarily focused on the problems that matter in contemporary scholarship. On these, though everyone will find areas which they would deal with slightly differently,

the authors preserve a uniformly excellent standard of treatment. In particular they emphasize, in a very salutary way, the problems to which we can never expect to find an answer. What we can outline appears silhouetted against the voids of the life of the poor, the provincial, the speaker of Celtic. The only serious omission – a deliberate one – is an extended comparison or synthesis of the situations of the Greek and Latin worlds. Of course we hear much of the East in detail, but despite the Braudelian perspective of the first chapter, and an economic model which embraces the whole Roman world, there is no real attempt to produce general statements which characterize the society of the whole Mediterranean. Apart from this, the book is truly self-sufficient; but it is a major exception. The reader has to take for granted a whole range of questions about the nature of the interaction of Greek and Roman cultures and value-systems.

Similarly, there is a danger that McCann's work could be taken as autonomous. In truth, much must depend on how the results presented in *The Roman Port and Fishery of Cosa* should be combined with the difficulties arising from other work in this remarkably rich area – for example, the controversial interpretation of the local agricultural estate at Settefinestre, recently excavated by an Anglo-Italian team; or with the American work in the town itself (and there have clearly been substantial differences of opinion between the two sets of excavators). Cosa is the base of our best example of senatorial involvement in the sea-borne wine trade, indicated by the jar-stamps of the Sestii; but this adds to the complexity of assessing the relationship between the port and the land, and the place of Cosa within the rapidly growing subject of amphora-studies throughout the Mediterranean, with which the work of the publisher of the Cosa amphorae is not always completely congruent, the more so since she uses a new classification system of her own. But archaeological publications are always work in progress, and this is a very good one of its kind: if properly read, it will not mislead.

Both these books in their own way take the present too much as the *point de repère* for the past. Garnsey and Saller, it is true, begin with detachment, most usefully in their chapter on supplying the Roman Empire – and they nobly refrain from quoting yet again David Hume's surprise at not finding an ancient city whose

growth was due to manufacture. They find against extreme minimalist positions, and that is partly because they are often founded on unhelpful comparisons with the present. But their welcome rejection of evolutionism could go much further. They still emphasize the notion of the ancient world as an "underdeveloped economy", and draw a distinction between "optimist" and "pessimist" positions in ancient history (they count as mildly optimistic, though they clearly lack the very enthusiastic view which McCann has of the heyday of ancient Cosa). Their exclusion of many aspects of the Hellenic owes something to modern expectations of ethnicity and cultural allegiance. Perhaps the peasant model for the basic ancient agrarian population, and the continuing emphasis on agricultural slavery, could also be cited in this context. It is difficult but desirable to face the possibilities that the ancient world did not seem in general to experience the mystic tie of peasant to smallholding, but rather often to have expected the very poor to be to some extent mobile, and that the preferred deployment of slave-manpower was in direct pursuit of the aristocratic life of comfort. Many of these more unexpected angles on ancient society emerge more readily from the archaeological evidence which lends itself to visual presentation – much of the novelty in the presentation of Garnsey and Saller derives originally from work presented like McCann's. We need to bring the two together, not to hold them apart; to temper the modernist optimism about ancient prosperity in McCann with the realism of Garnsey and Saller, and to show how their account, and others yet to be formulated, relate to the material itself.

This was a world in which tunny-fishing and the construction of huge fisheries, like the installation of geared bucket chains to raise spring-water vertically, formed part of the creative display of the elite, playing at changing the landscape, at defying nature: so they should not simply be pigeon-holed as "part of the economy of the region of Cosa", or "a step along the path to early modern hydraulics". Slaves of all origins worked equipment of Alexandrian inspiration to enhance the wealth won by selling luxury foodstuffs to the élites of Gaul. The Roman world is getting harder, not easier, to explain, and it is much to their credit that both of these books help make that clearer.

Fortunate isle

Peter Warren

JOHN BOARDMAN and C. E. VAPHIOPOULOU-RICHARDSON (Editors)
Chios: A conference at the Homereion in Chios 1984
 361pp. Oxford: Clarendon Press, £40.
 019814643X

Chios is among the larger, fertile and most beautiful of Greek islands. It lies just off the Turkish coast, like its neighbour Samos to the south. These few facts have much explanatory force for remarkably recurrent themes of success and suffering in Chios's history. Environment, however, cannot be a total determinant of life-style or historical process. Chian mercantile and maritime enterprise converted geographical potential or exigency to notable achievement over some three and a half millennia of Greek life, from Mycenaean times to the present.

The island's literature, history, art and archaeology were examined at a conference in April 1984 at the Homereion, a fine Cultural Centre in the capital, Chora, and a gift to the people of Chios from the late Michael Xylas, one of their lending shipowners. The proceedings are here published, well edited by John Boardman and C. E. Vaphiopolou-Richardson, in a volume remarkable in its variety of topics and in its rich veins of scholarship as relevant to the Greek world in its totality as to Chios alone. Sir David Hunt's preface, elegant in its learning lightly worn, is followed by twenty-six papers. Throughout there is a happy combination of serious scholarship (much of it in the extensive footnotes) and writing that is eminently readable. "Epigraphy in Chios: Cyriac of Ancona to Stephanou" may not immediately top a popular reading list, yet only a

Theopompus, short on neither self-esteem nor spleen (Robin Lane Fox probes all), could read George Forrest's epigraphical paper without laughing a dozen times in delight.

Chios makes the best claim for being the place of Homer's birth, and Jasper Griffin opens by discussing the mixture of heroic ideas, the obligations of heroism, and everyday, non-heroic attitudes in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Oliver Taplin writing on Homeric military campaigns, introduces one Chian leit-motif, east Aegean antagonisms. The Chians were to be ravaged by the Persians after the Ionian Revolt in 494 BC, in alliance with Mausolus in the 350s (Lane Fox), destroyed by Mithridates in 86 BC (Th. Sarikakis), massacred by Turks in 1822 (Francis Haskell, whose final paper heroically documents the unattractive Delacroix's thoughts and aims when painting his famous work, "a somewhat inadequate emotional response to the implications of the events depicted").

For much of the time, however, Chios was rich and prosperous, its wealth founded on local production and export of its famous wine and its music, and its carrying trade, notably in slaves. The settlement pattern which supported this outgoing enterprise is examined by Sinclair Hood (for the Mycenaeans), K. Rhomaios (via the pseudo-Herodotean life of Homer and "Homer's Stope", in origin a baetyl of Cybele), N. Yalouris (temple of Apollo Phanaios), Vasilios Lambroukakis (ancient farmhouses) and E. Yalouris in his full diachronic topographical study. Much of this topographical work has been stimulated by the successful excavations of the British School at Athens under Hood and Boardman. Overseas activity, political, religious, artistic and commercial, forms the core of substantial papers by C. Roehbeck (sixth century BC), J. P. Barron

(fifth century, Chios quiet as part of the Athenian Empire), Lane Fox (fourth century and Theopompus), Sarikakis (commercial relations), and six or seven studies on Chiot art, notably its fine white-slipped pottery with lively decoration, and its independence in almost all things from its neighbour Samos (Helmut Kyrieles). Chios's most famous large monument overseas was the great altar before the temple of Apollo at Delphi. Pierre Amandry's very full analysis of the altar contributes more to matters Delphian than Chian, but he also explicates Chian politics in third-century BC Delphi and considers the strength of the case for Chian attribution of some fine works now splendidly displayed in the Delphi Museum. Meanwhile Chian Dexamenos was producing some of Greece's finest miniature works in his brilliant gem-engraving. Overseas activity in literature can be seen most notably in the career of Dexamenos' contemporary, Ion of Chios, philosophical and narrative prose writer, whose Athenian links and place in Greek literature Sir Kenneth Dover discusses.

The Roman and Byzantine periods, like the prehistoric and the Genoese, are but slightly represented (reflection of Oxford's interests or lack of them? – most of the British contributors are from Oxford). But A. Tsaravopoulos presents among the volume's excellent colour-plates a newly found Roman mosaic with links to Piazza Armerina, and C. Pennas publishes a very precise re-examination of the Byzantine basilica of St Isidoros, the island's patron saint. There was presumably nothing substantially new to say about one of Greece's noblest Byzantine monuments, the church of the Nea Morie in the hills of central Chios, with its wall mosaics.

Renaissance dissemination of classical learning through the travelling scholars and manuscript collectors like Averroës, Bessarion and

and Cyriac, who sojourned in the island, are given most stimulating exposition by Robert Browning, C. M. Woodhouse and Forrest, while J. S. Richardson thoughtfully examines levels of continuity from the Homeric poems and their successors in Chian popular songs and poetry.

Recurrent Greek themes – enrichment of knowledge through travel, maritime enterprise, sudden destruction – are exemplified by Chios throughout her history. Patronage is another. Xylas's gift of the Homereion to Chios is mentioned above. In 1920 a sum of 10,000 drachmas was deposited in a bank for the French School of Archaeology for use in the restoration of the great Chian altar at Delphi. It was given by the municipality of Chios. I mention it *exempli gratia*, since leading Greek families all over their country continue the practice, to the enrichment and development of Greece's heritage.

Peter Birks and Grant McLeod's new translation of *Justinian's Institutes* (160pp. Duckworth, £24; paperback, £9.95, 0 715621106) is published with their English version on facing pages of the Latin text as edited by Paul Krüger (1867) and preceded by a clear and contemporary relevant and revealing introduction; in it the translators say of the Emperor Justinian's elementary textbook for students that "It has some claim to be the most important law book ever written. It could hardly be omitted from any list of the world's dozen or so most influential books."

A revised edition of Robert Browning's *Justinian and Theodora* (189pp. Thames and Hudson, £14.95, 0 500 25099 5) has been published. The TLS reviewer acknowledged the original 1971 edition as "a useful and thoroughly readable summary of all the material that is known

Plausible, if not true

Peter Smith

JOSEPH MARGOLIS
Pragmatism without Foundations: Reconciling realism and relativism
 320pp. Oxford: Blackwell, £25.
 0631 19324 X

How can realism possibly be reconciled with relativism? Scientific realists (for example) are committed to the thesis that scientific theories aim to capture aspects of a unique reality whose structure is independent of the theorist's attempts to describe it. By contrast, many relativists about science reject any conception of a single theory-independent reality which confers truth or falsity on our scientific claims, seizing upon Kuhn's incautious remark that proponents of competing theoretical paradigms "practise their trades in different worlds". Thus understood, relativism about science, far from being compatible with realism, is partially defined by its opposition. Doubtless, scientific realism is compatible with relativism about, say, moral values (always assuming that some coherent formulation of relativism is available). But how is it possible to be both realist and relativist about the same domain?

The best hope for a serious reconciliation would seem to depend on discerning in scientific realism (to continue with that example) a confused mixture of empirical truth and metaphysical excess. The resourceful relativist can then enrol under the banner of "Empirical Realism but Metaphysical Anti-Realism". The route to a suitably subtle form of relativism is familiar enough. For if the scientific realist's metaphysical conception of a theory-independent world is not to be an idle fancy, then he must be optimistic that our best techniques for constructing and testing theories provide us with a good chance of gleaming truths about that world, and that the consonance of theory with observational data is reason enough

to warrant a (defeasible) ascription of non-relative truth. But this apparently presupposes that our observational beliefs have a prior purchase on the truth; and how can this be so if, as contemporary dogma has it, even our most observational beliefs are themselves laden with the very theories whose claim to represent the world is in question?

At this point Quinean pragmatism begins to look attractive. For the pragmatist acknowledges no theoretical virtues higher than internal coherence and the capacity to accommodate our propensities to make judgments in response to perceptual stimulation; so he is not embarrassed by the "bootstrapping" relation between observation and theory which troubles the realist. Of course, within our overall theory of nature we recognize that most happenings are independent of the thoughts of theory-building creatures such as ourselves; in other words, our theory embodies an empirical realism. But now, reflecting on the broad contours of this theory, we must recognize how they are shaped by our sense of what is a simple or natural mode of explanation, and our feeling for what can count as the application of old concepts to new cases. And these most basic determinants of our conceptual framework are grounded in very general facts of our human life which could, it seems, have been otherwise – indeed, may be otherwise in sufficiently remote cultures. We cannot say empirically that the world would have been otherwise had we been different; but the truth of a kind of transcendental relativism arguably shows itself in the way that our theory-building enterprises are necessarily rooted in our merely local form of life.

This line of thought brings us to the heart of hotly disputed territory: and a good discussion of these central themes – pragmatism, realism, relativism – would be most timely. But Joseph Margolis in *Pragmatism without Foundations* (largely a reworking of journal articles) has not provided the overview we need. As far as I can make out, his central conciliatory project is

intended to be secured, not by any adequate investigation of the distinction between the empirical and the transcendental, but by a pair of tendentious redefinitions of both "realism" and "relativism". The minimal core of realism, he tells us, is "the generic thesis that the world is so ordered that human inquiry is effectively



A detail from "White Radish", 1933, one of the photographs in Edward Weston in Los Angeles by Susan Danly and Weston J. Naeff (64pp. San Marino, CA: Huntington Library and Art Gallery, \$10, 0 87328 092 X).

'linked' to its structures', so that we may construe realism "as, minimally, the rejection of scepticism". But it is surely quite extraordinary to build epistemic optimism into a definition of realism when the central thrust of most debates about realism concerns, precisely, the question whether realism as it is ordinarily understood is

compatible with epistemic optimism or necessarily engenders scepticism. As for relativism, that (according to Margolis) is best construed

as an empirically motivated thesis to the effect that, in particular sectors of enquiry, it is methodologically inadvisable to retreat from insisting on a strong bipolar model of truth and falsity, while not denying that the affected propositions or claims are genuinely such and, as such, are to be ascribed suitable truth-like values – just such, in fact, that on the bipolar model (but no longer) would yield and confirm incompatibles.

Thus we might say, for example, that two literary interpretations which are inconsistent if construed as representing the truth of the matter should rather be seen as perhaps both equally "apt" or "plausible": Margolis's relativist suggests a more general retreat from truth to something like "aptness". But again, it seems extraordinary to recommend such a retreat as a way of saving realism. For, from a realist perspective, the "bipolar model" (as Margolis calls it) is dictated by the thought that the distribution of any values that are genuinely "truth-like" is dictated by the existence or non-existence of corresponding states of affairs in the world; and the distinction between existence and non-existence is necessarily bipolar.

So Margolis seems to take wrong turns right at the start. But I may be doing him an injustice. For his writing is rarely pellucid and he is inordinately fond of this sort of sentence:

Human inquiry pursues universal conditions without universalism, foundations without foundationalism, essentials without essentialism – by way of transcendental arguments practically generated and practically confined: direct, rationally directed at guessing (or, better, directed at proposing or ideally projecting) the necessary within the contingent, the *a priori* within the empirical; hence, also, unavoidably rhetorical in at heart, shaping its picture of a rational method for doing so through its own diachronic review of the historically contingent practice it means to review.

After a few pages of such numbingly pretentious prose it is difficult to be sure any more what Margolis is trying to say.

Ancient contemporaries

David Sedley

MICHAEL WOODS (Editor)
Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy
 Volume 4: A Festschrift for J. L. Ackrill
 243pp. Oxford: Clarendon Press, £25
 (paperback, £12.95).
 0 192849497
 J. D. G. EVANS
 Aristotle
 208pp. Brighton: Harvester, £28.50.
 0 31200485 0

In organizing a Festschrift for his colleague, J. L. Ackrill, Michael Woods has weathered the usual dangers of such enterprises rather well. The overall standard of the contributions is high, and the device chosen to give the volume a firm identity is the effective one of taking over one issue of a recognized journal. *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, of which the Ackrill Festschrift is Volume Four, has, under its founding editor, Julia Annas, rapidly established itself as a major journal in its field. It is in any case the natural home for a collection in honour of someone who has done much to shape the study of Plato and Aristotle in Oxford over the past third of a century. John Ackrill's own work in this area has been distinguished above all by his sharpness in discerning a philosophical problem, his singularly clear and methodical approach to its exposition and resolution, and the judicious balance he maintains between the demands of historical caution and philosophical profit.

This volume offers five articles on Plato, five on Aristotle, and two focused on later developments. Following a not unfamiliar pattern (although this is by no means a feature of Ackrill's own work) it is those on Plato that show the least tendency to represent their subject as a contributor to twentieth-century philosophical concerns, most of them emphasizing instead the broader context of his own thought. In his "Teleology and the Good in Plato's

Phaedo", David Wiggins defends an unfashionable reading of the passage where Socrates describes his resort to a method of explanation in terms of Forms, following the failure of his initial quest for teleological explanations. Given the orchestrating role among Forms assigned to the Good in the later *Republic*, argues Wiggins, we need not read this move as an abandonment of teleology. Perhaps most interesting here is the methodological issue raised. He suggests that (even without "unitarian" expectations about Plato's work) we can legitimately invoke the later text in elucidation of the earlier: "there are cases where the only way to understand a philosophical thought is to see what can be made of it, and where the only way to see that is to see what was made of it". Having exploited the *Republic* (and Leibniz) to this end, he invites us to "discount everything I have said that is not explicitly licensed in *Phaedo*". Much as I applaud the principle on offer, I would have welcomed some suggestions about what is left in this particular case once the injunction has been obeyed.

Collin Strang returns to a time-honoured issue of Platonic exegesis, the "Cave" simile. Julius Moravcsik, in "On Correcting the Poets", tackles the issue of literary "truth". He takes his starting-point in the *Republic's* critique of poetry. And I particularly enjoyed Lesley Brown's "Being in the *Sophist*: A syncretic enquiry". The meaning of "being" in Plato's investigation of "not-being" is one of the most vexed issues of recent scholarship. It is worryingly easy to believe whatever one read last about it. But this study is especially successful in showing why the Greek verb for "being" does not lend itself to a simple distinction between "complete" (existential) and "incomplete" (copulative) uses: the difference in sense between these is sometimes no more substantial than that between the verb "teach" in "is teaching" and the same verb in "is teaching French".

Gail Fine's "Immanence", if not making Plato a contributor to current philosophical concerns, is at any rate a heroic effort to make him less alien, arguing, in line with other recent

work of hers, against the standard reading of his Forms as "separated" from particulars. Relying here on the *Phaedo*, the classic text for separation, she earns full marks for dogged ingenuity in rebutting objections to her case. But there are bound to be many residual worries. For one thing, if Forms are really immanent in particulars, how much sense can we make of the *Phaedo's* radical anti-empiricism?

Julia Annas's contribution, "Aristotle on Memory and the Self", is a nice example of the way in which the interpretation of an undervalued Aristotelian text can both fuel, and in turn be fuelled by, new philosophical insights – in this case, a development of Aristotle's distinction in his *On Memory* between memory as such, which Annas argues is "personal" in that it entails recall of a past experience, and impersonal "recollection" (of information).

David Charles, in "Aristotle: Ontology and moral reasoning", offers an illuminating way out of a problem once raised by Ackrill, why Aristotle should be so insistent that moral action (*praxis*) and technical "production" (*poiesis*) are mutually exclusive classes of event. The remaining Aristotelian papers also reflect in appropriate ways Ackrill's own contributions and interests. Woods discusses some notoriously tricky passages in *Nicomachean Ethics* VI where Aristotle describes practical wisdom's intuitive, *ad hoc* character. He gives them an unusual degree of importance by his surprising conclusion that in Aristotle's view there is no intellectual grasp of what constitutes the good life over and above one's ability to recognize goodness in particular cases. Christopher Kirwan provides a judicious appraisal of the evidence for Aristotle's holding that the present is necessary. And Bernard Williams writes on Aristotle's distinctive thesis that mind stands to body as form to matter, arguing that it cannot ultimately distinguish itself from mild materialism. A worry with which the article very properly leaves one is how far Aristotle's own theory was even intended as an account of what individual souls are.

Finally, Jonathan Barnes offers a masterly

analysis of a passage in which the Peripatetic Alexander defends the thesis that in the negation of a singular proposition the negation sign properly governs the predicate, not the whole proposition. And Richard Sorabji discusses entertainingly the hypotheses that space and time might return upon themselves in seamless loops. Both notions are coherent, he concludes, but only the latter, that of "closed time", is prefigured in ancient thought.

The most distinctive feature of J. D. G. Evans's *Aristotle* is perhaps its sustained and often helpful attempt to isolate certain dialectical patterns in individual Aristotelian arguments. The series title, "Philosophers in Context", is unfortunately misleading. Readers will learn from Evans's book neither who Aristotle was, nor what century he lived in, nor the literary character of his texts, nor even that he was the father of his relation to his predecessors, but the stronger focus is on his relation to Kant, to Frege and to the twentieth century. This is, it seems, a book which works best if taken to cater for readers at least moderately conversant with current philosophical concerns, seeking to show them that there are many individual Aristotelian arguments to which they can immediately tune in. Even the chapter "Aristotelian Method" is largely taken up with showing us how to isolate such issues as moral relativism and psycho-physical parallelism in Aristotle, despite the risk of inverting his own philosophical priorities by so doing.

But once the book's true scope is appreciated, there is much to recommend it. It is written with great clarity and consideration, and offers fresh insights and suggestions on a number of key issues, especially in the areas of linguistic and metaphysical philosophy, even if most of the less conventional interpretations are unlikely to prove persuasive without more detailed defence than the book's format permits. I doubt if it will by itself equip any reader to engage with the Aristotelian treatises at first hand – the material as presented is too heavily predigested for that. But it could whet many appetites.

The getting of wisdom

Anne Duchêne

MONICA FURLONG
Wise Child
224pp. Gollancz. £7.95.
0575 04067

Monica Furlong has elected to set her first novel for young readers in the seventh century, in the kingdom of Dalriada, on what we call Mull. It is very short, and contains an almost dangerously rich mix of components: elements of the traditional founding-story, fairy-story and adventure-story, a strong tincture of what may seem old-fashioned morality, and an even stronger admixture of contemporary thoughts about the "alternative" life, and even about the occult. Very occasionally, one can, as it were, see the joins; but most of the time the story moves seamlessly, governed by a vivid, confident pen and by a generous intelligence.

The story tells what happens when Wise Child – given this teasing Gaelic sobriquet because she is not quite like other children – is adopted by Juniper, who is quite unlike other young women. Juniper lives in an isolated cottage, and visits the village only when summoned, when an illness or injury has gone beyond the villagers' simples. She does not attend the village church (a brief foreword reminds us that Mull has been Catholic for two centuries). Indeed, she is a high priestess elsewhere; and certainly she is charismatic in the strict sense of that abused term – one does not doubt the healing powers of her herbs, her hands or her presence, and readers may be persuaded that she is handsome too, though this is never stated.

The villagers, naturally, reckon her a *cal-leach*, or witch. But in fact she is a *doran*. "The word *doran* came from our Gaelic *dorus*, an entrance or way in (the English have a word very like it). It was someone who had found a

way in to seeing or perceiving", records Wise Child, the narrator, and when she asks, "Seeing or perceiving what?", Juniper says, "The energy – the pattern".

Slowly, Wise Child learns to live "in the rhythm" herself. She learns, first, to be clean and to enjoy keeping things clean; then, the properties and preparation of herbs (left sketchy, very wisely); also English and Latin, mathematics and poetry, to prepare her for life in a wider world. In short, the disciplines of work, and its satisfactions. She is also rubbed all over with a vile-smelling ointment, and experiences "flying". When Juniper takes her to a mainland meeting of *dorans*, however, they travel by land and sea, not air – just as the food they put outside at night is not for the fairies, but for the leprous, isolated brother of the village priest. Wise Child ends as a novitiate *doran*; but the point is strongly made, that this depends less on herbs and ointments than on intuition and intelligent sympathy.

Naturally, she sometimes fails. At one point, she embarks on a good deal of scrambling among rocks and caves (those who cannot stand detailed street directions may find these bits a waste of the book's valuable time), and thus falls into the thrall of her runaway mother, Maeve the Fair. Maeve's magic spells, however, are pretty commonplace – all to do with vanity – and though there are some nasty moments one never seriously doubts that Juniper's good medicine will drive out Maeve's evil.

It does this spirited little book an injustice, if any such summary suggests it is prim or didactic, or what might be called "smockish" – only for the children of simple-livers. It is full of light and vigour and vital discovery. The jacket, after running into the same summarizing difficulties, concludes it is a book which "young readers will find most pertinent to our world today". Well, perhaps not that, exactly. But it will certainly persuade a great many young readers that they want to be *dorans* when they grow up.

Small-world disturbances

Joanna Motion

RUTH PARK
My Sister Sif
180pp. Viking Kestrel. £5.95.
0670 815241
SIMON FRENCH
All We Know
255pp. Angus and Robertson. £5.95.
0207 153590

Political disturbance isn't the only tremor that can shake the paradisaical calm of a Pacific island. Ruth Park sets her new children's novel, *My Sister Sif*, on Rongo, "a needle stuck upright in the seabed", in the plausibly named Epiphany Group, somewhere beyond Fiji and Tonga. For fourteen-year-old Erika and especially for her oldest sister Sif, the place is perfect: not just because of the welcoming Polynesian islanders, tucking gleefully into hamburgers and recreational aspirin, or its other occupants the Menahune, a pre-Stone Age race, part dwarf, part fairy; but also because the girls belong to the sea people, the creatures whom the rest of us mistake for mermaids. The sea people and their underwater city, like the dolphins, whales and reef creatures with whom they share the transparent waters of the Pacific, are threatened by the corruption that human beings wreak on the rest of the natural world. Park places the book in the year 2000, revisiting the events of the previous decade when the culmination of nuclear testing, industrial pollutants, mining of the seabed and slicking oil have poisoned that world. For cocksure, bossy Erika, furiously resisting the inevitability of growing up, the blame lies with the unwelcome adult world and all those who "hang around like wet dish cloths and let dreadful things happen to our planet". She sets out to bridge the two realms, to acquire the skills of the adult city and become a marine biologist, patching the wounds of her tropical home; to maintain a childlike clarity ("ecology isn't something on the outside of us, it's us") in the

face of the pain and complexity of the world she inherits.

Despite the seriousness of its subject, *My Sister Sif* is not a sombre book. Erika's struggles out of childhood are chronicled with down-to-earth humour and Park has a nice line in semi-rational explanations of the magical which soothes the sceptical reader without diminishing the enjoyment of the magic.

The Sydney suburb in *All We Know* is part of what Erika and Sif are running away from in returning to Rongo. Arki Gerhardt lives in the one remaining weatherboard house in a street of blocks of flats – "home units" – beside a littered beach. On her way to school, dragging her young brother away from the Space Invaders machines, Arki walks past "Tracey & Jeff 4 Ever" sprayed on the shop walls and the broken glass left by an enraged husband who has taken a hammer to his wife's car. Her mother and stepfather are teachers – sympathetic, synthesizer-playing ones – who inhabit the daunting world of the High School she is on the verge of entering. Arki, like Erika, is in transition, quietly observing the key players in her life through changing eyes: outgrowing a close friendship, shifting her relations with her bed-wetting brother from irritation to tolerance; beginning to perceive her parents and teachers as individuals with histories that pre-date her and concerns outside her own. This watching, learning process is accelerated by the old camera she starts to use to record the potent everyday landmarks of her thirteenth year: I am a camera; I am almost a teenager.

Simon French is vigorous and confident in settings that would seem desolately contemporary in less deft hands (though a cat named Goodvibes takes some overlooking). He makes an absorbing story out of the familiar territory of classrooms and car rides, separating parents and sparring friends, with consistently convincing dialogue. There are no Rongian lagoons or volcanoes for Arki, but, internal and domestic though it may be, there is some mystery and wonder none the less.

Everyday mysteries

Nicole Irving

VIVIAN ALCOCK
The Mysterious Mr Ross
175pp. Methuen. £7.95.
0416 013120
CAROLYN SLOAN
The Sea Child
128pp. Bodley Head. £5.95.
0370 307801

There are lands where fables hold sway, where mermaids emerge from the water with the ease and naturalness of a child who has had its swim and comes out to dry off and play in the sand. There is also everyday reality, a world more complicated than the phrase allows, but still arguably one most adults and children are familiar with. And there is a land in between, which is where many stories are set. This often looks deceptively like the everyday world, but with an inexplicable something more to it, such as the mysterious Mr Ross of Vivian Alcock's latest novel, who is fished out of a dangerous sea by an ordinary little girl, Felicity. In an ordinary seaside town that could easily lie on the Sussex coast, Mr Ross may simply be a rootless young man whose past, if only he revealed it, would answer the questions that hover around him. On the other hand, he could be an embodiment of the fantastic, the spirit in human form of the wandering albatross whose skull Felicity and her friend Pony find when they return at low tide to the place where he first appeared.

The question-marks have not been entirely shaken off when, at the satisfying, mildly tantalizing end of the story, Mr Ross turns down Felicity's mother's offer of a home and a job in her holiday guesthouse and sets off to continue his wanderer's life. In the mean time, the few weeks' recuperative stay with Felicity's family has brought much excited speculation to the guesthouse and the town: it has made a bit of a heroine of young Felicity and tested her friendship with clever, fat-boy Pony. It has of course given Vivian Alcock the opportunity to

fill out her portrait of these two appealing child characters, but equally to explore the give and take of family relationships. She does this with sensitivity and humour, charting the visitor's catalytic effect on the smooth running of the Fairweather Guesthouse. The new turns the outsider brings to its life allow Felicity to challenge her mother's unflagging efficiency and to bring about a renewal of her mother's warmth towards her and her father, a nice man who understandably keeps out of the way and close to a bottle.

If Carolyn Sloan's *The Sea Child* shared something of this hopefulness, we might forgive the troubling way in which it mingles the rational with the fantastic and leaves us confused as to what we are supposed to believe. We are here denied the options that Vivian Alcock's story fostered: a journalist's corroboration leaves no room to doubt the real existence – described in great material detail – of little Jessie and her father Danny on the island where they live, cut off from the mainland by past storms which destroyed the ship-wreckers' and smugglers' village which was their home. Since babyhood, Jessie has not seen a human being other than Danny, and her growing curiosity added to her father's sense of doom result in his showing her, on her tenth birthday, the dangerous secret passage leading to the mainland. Here she is ill-received by the suspicious and superstitious community, with the exception of another motherless girl, Lisa.

The story gradually unfolds with many original twists. But social satire sits unhappily next to the haunting gloom and with the strangeness of a tale which will have us believe that Jessie's mother came from the sea, and now returns to reclaim her progeny. Sloan's style also sometimes jars with the past in which the story is set: Lisa's woman-of-the-sea mother is described as having "a sort of style" and Lisa, confiding to Jessie the villagers' conviction that she is a ghost, "caught the simple craziness of the situation and began to laugh". With Jessie returned to the sea, her father Danny entirely alone, and Lisa severely ill, the

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THE TIMES



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